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ADrift IN A HAUNTED LAKE; OR, THE MYSTERY OF A LOST WAR SHIP.

B. ROGER STARBUCK.



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Adrift in a Haunted Lake;

OR,

The Mystery of a Lost War-Ship.

By ROGER STARBUCK,

Author of "Sam Sureshot, the Skeleton Marine," "Dick Deadline, the Young Revenue Captain," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A PERILOUS ENCOUNTER.

"Look out for Bullmouth! He'll tear you to pieces with his tusks if he gets hold of you, Rob. The menagerie men of Manhattanville, from whom the hippopotamus escaped, are hunting alongshore for him, you know, and they say he is an uncommonly ugly beast for his kind."

The person addressed was Rob Ransom, the young second mate, of seventeen, aboard the brig *Amelia*, lying at anchor in the Hudson, off the rocky shore, which, at that time, bordered the river on the New York side.

The man who spoke to the youth about the escaped beast from the menagerie was one of the brig's crew of fifteen sailors, then in the fore-castle, and before whom the boy stood, stripped of everything except his blue pants and undershirt.

"I'll risk it," said Rob. "It is not a very long swim from here to land—not more than half a mile, and it is not likely I will fall in with the animal you speak of."

"If you are determined to leave the brig, Mr. Ransom, why don't you wait until after the hippopotamus has been recaptured?"

"The brig may be on her way to the West Indies by then," answered Rob. "The captain, as you know, has threatened to have me ironed and put into the hold for refusing to rope's end poor little cabin boy Dick every time he accidentally spills water or breaks a dish, and I am not going to stand such treatment longer. Captain Trump has an idea that because I was bound apprentice to him four years ago, after my mother died, and just before my father breathed his last, that he can compel me to play the tyrant the same as he does."

"Right, Rob!" "Ay, ay, sir, right enough you are!" "We don't blame you!" etc., etc., were the remarks that broke from the crew.

"It's a moonlight night," continued Rob, "and I can see my way. My clothes have all been secretly taken to the deserted hut ashore by Boatswain Bill, and I shall make the attempt to leave the craft now."

"It's unfortunate about that escaped brute—the hippopotamus," said one of the sailors. "Pity he wasn't drunk, as the captain now is, so he could not interfere with you."

"I'm not afraid of him," replied Rob. "Better death anyway than to stay aboard this craft."

"I don't know about that, sir. A hippy—I've seen many on 'em, my lad—is worse'n a drunken skipper."

"And the menagerie fellows have been hunting about this part of the shore opposite all day for that fierce lubber of a brute," said another. "Like as not he's a-cruisin' somewhere about the very part of the shore you're a-goin' to swim for. Look out for yourself, Mr. Ransom. You can do nothin' with that knife in your belt. Them critters' hides is as tough as a sheet anchor."

"Never fear for me, boys," said Rob Ransom. "And now it's time I was off. But I couldn't leave without coming down here to bid you good-bye."

"And sorry we are to part with you," said one of the men, while the rest expressed themselves in a similar way. "You've been a good officer to us."

They were all fine, able seamen—as smart a set of foremast hands as ever manned an ocean craft—and big and rough though they were, they wrung Rob's hands and hung on to them with a sort of sorrowful simplicity, almost like that of little children.

Finally Rob broke away from them and went on deck, followed by all.

It was a clear, moonlight night, and the shore was visible, with the dark background of trees beyond.

The first mate had gone ashore, the captain was below, drunk and still drinking, and Boatswain Bill had the watch.

He came up, shook hands with Rob, and wished him good luck.

"Pity," he said, "you couldn't make a shorter swim of it to that

craft yonder," pointing out as he spoke to a beautiful armed topsail schooner—the *Mary Bell*—lying at anchor about half a mile off.

"Glad enough I'd be to go there, if I thought the captain would take me," answered Ransom. "He's a fine young fellow. I've seen him go by in his cutter several times, and I have heard that he is bound on a cruise to look for a lost father—Captain Howland, of the gunship *Monmouth*, which was last seen in the Mozambique Channel, off the south-east coast of Africa."

"Ay, sir, I've heard of the strange disappearance of the *Monmouth*," replied the boatswain. "There's many a reef, rock and sand bank off that coast, but it's a mystery why, if the ship struck one of 'em, no sign, not even a stick, timber, or so much as a boat-keg belonging to her has been found."

Soon after the boatswain spoke Rob Ransom dropped quietly overboard and struck out for the shore.

The men watched him as long as he was in sight.

They saw him finally disappear among the deep shadows and rocks alongshore.

They would willingly have rowed him to land in a boat, but Rob had refused this. He preferred to take the whole responsibility of his desertion upon his own shoulders, so that no one else need have trouble with the captain about it.

As he was an officer, the men could not hinder his leaving the craft, and as for reporting the desertion, the captain could not blame them for not doing so, as he had locked and bolted his cabin door, and was in a stupid, beastly state of intoxication.

Swimming on, Rob, as stated, was finally among the shadows of the rocks.

He kept on toward the shore, now but about four fathoms off, when he fancied he beheld a dark object just disappearing round the end of a rock ahead.

The thought of the escaped hippopotamus at once flashed on his mind. He made as little noise as possible, and on reaching the shore, he looked carefully about him. Beyond the rock round which the moving object had disappeared, there was a thick growth of large, blue, water lilies.

Rob cautiously approached the bed of lilies where they skirted the land.

At first he saw nothing.

All at once he heard a gurgling, grunting sort of noise, and became aware that a pair of big, bulging eyes were looking up from the lilies.

He could see the flash of these orbs in the gloom of the shadow, and imagined he could discern the outline of an ugly ear.

"It is the escaped brute!" he reflected.

There was a splash, and the eyes disappeared.

He leaned over and scrutinized the bed of plants, but still the animal did not reappear.

He moved further along, and noticed a rugged archway or natural tunnel in a rock, near the further side of the plants.

Getting down on his hands and knees, he looked into the tunnel, which had an outlet in a small stream a few yards beyond.

He could see no sign of the beast in the tunnel.

"Probably he has swam far alongshore under 'water,'" thought Rob. "As I am not one of the menagerie men, I will not hunt for him further. I suppose the captain could make trouble for me if he chose to do so for deserting his craft. True, my desertion is a justifiable one, and I am confident I would win my case in a court of law.

Nevertheless I would prefer to keep out of Captain Trump's clutches for the present. It is not likely he will try to get back one who will not submit to his tyranny. Before he sails I will see a lawyer, have things arranged, and make a formal demand of him for my discharge."

Thus communing with himself, the youth glided among the trees towards the deserted hut, which was near the bank of the stream already mentioned.

The hut had no windows—only a door which was barred.

It had been inhabited by a squatter, who had so arranged the door

that it could be secured on the inside by means of a wooden pin to which a string was attached.

Rob soon entered the hut and pulled the door to.

He fastened it by means of a string, but unused to this, he broke it in pulling upon it.

Then he realized that he was shut up in the inclosure.

Not doubting, however, that he could break the door open, he looked about him for his clothes.

There was the bag containing them in a corner.

He opened the bag, and as he was doing so, he carelessly noticed a way of leaving the hut, which it seemed to him he had not observed during a previous visit to the place.

In fact, his eyes having become used to the gloom, which was partly relieved by a gleam of moonlight stealing through a small opening between the logs, he beheld an excavation under the foundation beam of the hut leading to the outside, large enough for him to crawl through.

Having put on his coat, jacket and boots, and tied the rest of his clothes and some other small articles in a bundle, he had stooped to make his exit through the cavity, when to his dismay he saw a huge, fierce looking head and a pair of eyes with short, hog-like ears at each side, projected through the cavity!

He started back, and, at the same time, with a deep, gurgling roar, the escaped hippopotamus drew the whole of its great body through the cavity.

There it stood upon its short, thick legs, glaring at him with fiery eyes and showed its crooked tusks, while deep, angry roars escaped its enormous mouth.

Rob had been in perilous situations at sea, but never before had he been confronted by a creature of this kind.

The door was fast—he could not open it—and the monster barred the sole way of exit from the hut. He was shut in there with this formidable beast.

He had only a knife in his belt.

What good was such an instrument against the tough, powerful brute confronting him?

A moment the animal stood looking at him.

Then it rushed toward him with open jaws.

Rob was young and active.

He bounded to the other side of the hut, hoping the beast in pursuing him would leave the cavity so that he could dart through it.

But the monster, as if guessing his thoughts, interposed its bulky form between him and the cavity.

Then again it rushed toward him.

It was now so near him that he had not time to avoid it.

He made a blow at one of its eyes with his knife.

The animal, however, raised its head, catching the blade between its teeth.

With a powerful jerk it drew the knife from the young officer's grasp and tossed it to one side.

Before the youth could avoid the creature, it had caught his jacket with its fangs.

It flung the boy down sideways.

He was now at the mercy of the brute.

With both hands did he grasp its throat, trying to keep it from fastening its tusks in him.

But he could not hold the strong head away from him. Down it came, and, in another moment, it would have crushed his skull, but for an unexpected interposition.

In fact, at this critical juncture a slender, active form, surmounted by a singular-looking head, closely shaven, with only a curiously woven tuft of hair projecting from the crown, darted like an arrow upon the back of the beast.

Then a broad-bladed hatchet gleamed in the dim light as it was uplifted, followed by a dull thud as it descended.

With its spine cut nearly in twain, the huge brute fell upon its side tearing at the earth with its snout and claws ere it expired.

CHAPTER II.

A QUEEN'S IMAGE OF GOLD.

SURPRISED at his unexpected deliverance from a horrible fate, Rob Ransom rose to his feet and looked at his preserver.

He saw before him, dimly revealed by the moonlight streaming into the hut, a supple, slender young man, habited in an ornamented sort of blouse and blue pants.

His face was nearly black, but his features were fine and regular.

His head was closely shaven, and the tuft of hair projecting from the crown was interwoven with grasses of different colors.

A string of bright blue beads encircled the neck, and there were ivory rings in the ears.

The eyes were round and glittered like emeralds.

"It was a narrow escape, but you have saved my life," said the boy. "Who are you, and how came you here in the nick of time?"

"I am Mandara—the Mashona. The menagerie men took me with them from my people, the Mashonas, near Manamotapa, in the African country of Mozambique. From there I was brought here to help take care of the wild beasts, brought from the same place. The hippopotamus escaped, and we have been hunting for it. Lately we separated to look in different directions. I was near here and I heard the roar of the animal. It led me this way, and I crept through the opening in the hut in time to save the white boy's life. It is well. I have done my duty, but the menagerie men will call me bad names for killing the beast."

"Surely not for doing so to save a human life," said Rob.

"Hark to the Mashona. The menagerie men are men of money. They have the money heart. They will bewail the loss of Bullmouth. Not of the boy saved will they think. They are not as they should be. They lured Mandara from his home, promising to pay him for his work. Have they paid him? No. Do they mean to pay him? No. He is going to leave them, for they do not keep their promises. They are not the kind of people they ought to be—the kind the missionaries who taught the Mashona to speak English, have said a man should be. Yes, Mandara will leave them."

"Are they white people?"

"No. They are half-breeds, Portuguese and negroes. They have hearts nearly as fierce as the Matabeles or the Masai warriors. Mandara is afraid they will kill him for slaying Bullmouth. No one knows the Mashona in this country. They could kill him and throw him in the river, and who would know it? Who would care?"

"Come," said Rob, "you take too dark a view of the affair. They will not go so far as that."

"Hark!" said Mandara. "Some of them are coming this way now. They, too, have heard the roar of Bullmouth. The Mashona is afraid. He would hide."

"They are making for the hut," said Rob. "Better to meet them outside than here. You have saved my life, and I will help you."

The two emerged from the hut.

Three fierce, dark-looking men were advancing with ropes in their hands.

At sight of Mandara they hastened toward him.

"Where is Bullmouth? We heard him," said one.

"Bullmouth is dead. I killed him. I did it to save this boy's life."

"Yes, he had to kill the brute, which was about to tear me to pieces," said Rob.

The three men set up a howl of blended surprise and rage.

"You had a rope," said one, pointing to a coil over the Mashona's shoulder. "Why did not you use that? There was no need for slaying the animal."

"He could not have used the rope in time to save me," answered Ransom.

"He has killed Bullmouth, that valuable animal," cried one.

"Bad!—bad!"

They glowed darkly upon Mandara.

"No longer shall he be in our service," said another. "But before he goes, we will punish him."

"We will tie a stone to his cursed heels and throw him in the river," said one of the three.

"Yes, yes, into the river with the fool!" cried the first speaker.

"No, no, this must not be!" said Ransom, firmly. "You shall not harm this boy."

"You better go away!" cried one of the trio. "Better not interfere!"

"I will interfere!" answered Rob. "Think you I am going to stand by and see this boy killed?"

"Ho! ho! We mean not to kill him. We will tie a stone to one ankle, put a knife in his hand and then throw him in. He is a good swimmer and can cut the stone clear. But he will suffer some before he cuts it, and that is how we mean to punish him."

"He may perish—not be able to cut the stone clear in time," said Rob. "It will be the same as murder. Besides, I do not want to see him hurt in any way."

The firm speech and manner of the youth had their effect on the men.

"We will give him a good beating, at any rate!" cried one.

The three rushed toward the Mashona with their clubs uplifted.

But Rob now pulled a pistol from his breast-pocket.

It was not loaded, as it would have been useless for him to put a charge in it when about to take to the water.

But the men before him knew nothing of this.

They came to a dead halt.

Then, suddenly one raised his club quickly to knock the pistol from the boy's hand.

Rob sprang backward a couple of feet, turning the pistol round and seizing it by the muzzle that he might use the butt.

The men, noticing this, at once divined that the weapon was not loaded.

They rushed upon the two boys, aiming blows at them with their clubs.

The shortness of his pistol hindered Ransom from making any effectual use of it.

He therefore drew back with Mandara behind a tree.

Then, taking from the Mashona the rope he carried, Rob suddenly hurled it so that the noose at the end caught about the neck of the foremost man.

The youth pulled the fellow violently down with a jerk upon the rope.

Then he hurled his pistol at one of the others.

The weapon struck the man between the eyes, causing him to reel and fall, half stunned. With a fierce oath he now drew a pistol from his pocket and fired.

But the bullet struck the tree and glanced off.

The two other men also drew their pistols, and the boys must have been seriously wounded, if not killed, but for the arrival of two persons who came running up.

One of these was a handsome, dark-eyed, young officer of about eighteen, wearing a neat naval uniform.

The others were common sailors, one carrying a large leather bag. Evidently these people were from the topsail schooner, Mary Bell, and had been after provisions or articles of some kind, which were in the bag.

"Avast there! What does this mean?" cried the youth, drawing a sword at his side.

The sailors with him kept near him to render assistance, if necessary.

Perceiving that their foul intention of shooting the boys was discovered, the three men, with angry mutterings, soon hurried off.

Then Rob, who had recognized in the officer the young captain of the Mary Bell, made explanations, commencing with the account of his desertion from the brig.

When he was through the captain looked at him closely in the dim light.

"I do not approve of desertion," he said. "But in your case I think you were justified, as a flogging of the cabin boy was undeserved. I never heard of such a case before—a second mate to be ironed because he refused to rope's end a boy."

"I was a bound apprentice," answered Rob, "and was promoted after I had served three years."

"But your captain had no right to be tyrannical. He has broken your articles of agreement, and you can obtain your discharge."

"It was to do this that I left the vessel."

"Well, now, as it happens I want a second lieutenant, and I hope when you procure your discharge you will ship with me in that capacity."

"I should only be too glad to," answered Rob, "but I know nothing of naval affairs—of the working of guns and that sort of thing."

"That's nothing. You will soon learn. Provided you are a good sailor, as I judge you to be, you will do first-rate."

"I am reckoned a good sailor."

"I guessed it the moment I looked at you. The Mary Bell is my own craft, not a government vessel. I have permission, however, from the government to make use of my guns and crew in any reasonable way that suits me during the search for my father's lost gun-ship, the Monmouth."

"I have heard of that vessel's being lost," said Rob. "The whole affair is mysterious enough."

"Ay, it happened about eighteen months ago, since which cruisers have vainly searched for the craft. I was aboard the sloop-of-war Reindeer, of the Gulf squadron, when it occurred. Having lately obtained a long leave of absence from the Reindeer, I am going to employ it in searching for my father. I have a picked crew and am nearly ready to sail. This vessel, the schooner Mary Bell, was owned by my father. I have had to make but a few alterations in her, as she was formerly the property of a sea-going, trading uncle of mine, who used her to convey some of his craft in the East India trade, as they were apt to be pounced upon by Malay pirates."

"A fine craft she is, I should say," remarked Rob, "and I wish you every success, as the loss of your father must cause you great anxiety."

"It does," answered the young captain. "My father, Captain Howland, was my only living relative. The strange disappearance of his craft, off the coast of Mozambique, puzzles all who have heard of it. Somehow I, his son, Jack Howland, cannot give up thinking that my parent is still alive."

Mandara, the Mozambique native, had listened with great interest to what was said.

As Jack concluded, he now made himself heard:

"Hark to the Mashona. He has that to say which the young white captain may like to hear. To the westward of where the ship Monmouth was lost, lies the land of the Mashonas. Here there are many old ruins, many abandoned gold shafts and workings, for this was the ancient land of Ophir, and here the Queen of Sheba had her palace. Now, then, listen again to the Mashona. He and his people believe that there is a gold image of the Queen of Sheba at the bottom of a certain haunted lake in this far away country of Mozambique. Who made that gold image was never known, but some of the wise men of Mashonaland have seen it at times appear and disappear at the bottom of the haunted lake. From head to foot the image is of gold, the eyes are emeralds, and the hair is of long gold threads. Misfortune and sorrow have ever been the lot of all who have tried to rescue that wonderful image."

"Mashona," answered Jack, "I have heard that it has been thought by some people that the ruins of Zimbabwe, in the Mashonaland of Mozambique, on the south-east part of Africa, are those of the palace of the Queen of Sheba. But that is a tradition of the Arabs and of your superstitious people. Of the gold image of the queen I never heard, nor of the Haunted Lake. But what have these things to do with the loss of my father's ship?"

"I heard from some of my people that he said he would go to look for the wonderful gold queen, nor was it long after when his ship passed away from the sight of man!" solemnly answered the Mashona.

CHAPTER III.

A THROW FOR LIFE.

As the Mashonas were known to be a superstitious people, believing in sorcery and enchantment, Jack attached but little importance to the last remark of Mandara.

He, however, said to him:

"Have you any idea as to where the ship was when she disappeared?"

"Ay, the Mashona could point out the very spot where it was supposed to be," answered Mandara.

"I would like to have you aboard my ship, Mashona," said Jack. "Will you go with me? You can act as a sort of pilot for me, and I will pay you well."

"Gladly will I go," answered Mandara, with sparkling eyes.

"Come then, we will board my craft at once, as soon as I signal for a boat. It would please me to have you go aboard with me, if you will," he added, turning to Rob.

The latter was only too glad of the chance to visit so fine a craft.

The three, with the accompanying sailors, walked to the shore, and one of the men signaled for a boat by blowing upon a boatswain's whistle.

This could be plainly heard on the schooner, and soon a cutter was seen approaching. By means of this the party were finally taken off to the schooner.

She was a fine craft of about 250 tons, painted black with a red stripe.

She carried six guns, three on a side, and Jack informed Rob that there was a plentiful supply of pistols and cutlasses in the cabin.

The schooner's masts and yards were tapering, and she had gracefully curved bows with the figurehead of a naid under her bowsprit.

Besides her square foresail and foretopsail she carried a small fore-top gallant sail.

Rob passed the night aboard this craft.

Next day he went ashore, saw a lawyer, and with this person he visited Captain Trump, of the brig Amelia.

The captain swore a little, but a few words from the lawyer soon brought him to reason, and Rob a few days later got his discharge papers.

He then shipped aboard Captain Jack Howland's schooner, which under a fair wind a week after was speeding like a beautiful sea bird through the Narrows into the Atlantic Ocean.

The crew consisted of thirty men, good sailors who had served aboard naval vessels, and knew how to handle the guns when necessary.

Mandara had quarters in a little cubby-hole of a steerage, aft, and he was often on deck as the vessel proceeded on her course.

He seemed much attracted both to Jack and Rob, but he would, now and then, beg the young captain to have nothing to do with hunting for the wonderful gold queen of the Haunted Lake.

"Unless it proved to be in some way connected with my father's disappearance, I will have no interest in that fabulous image," Jack would answer.

Then a gloomy expression would settle on the face of the Mashona.

"In case I find it necessary to go in search of the Haunted Lake you speak of," the young captain said to him one day, "I hope you will consent to pilot me there."

"The Mashona fears that his doom is sealed if he go there," sorrowfully answered Mandara. "But for the sake of the two white boys who have been so good to him, he will pilot them to the lake. He hopes they will not want to go to the haunted waters."

On went the schooner.

She had fair winds until within a few hundred miles of the Cape of Good Hope, when one of those strong south-east gales, which prevail in this region, was encountered.

In a few days, however, the gale veered round, blowing almost a typhoon.

Flying clouds of mist and rack hindered Jack from taking an observation, but he now knew he was being driven along on his course to the cape.

For two days did this typhoon-like gale continue to rage.

Under her close-reefed foresail the little schooner, flying along like a frightened bird, jumped the ragged, lofty, spray-covered seas, making wonderful headway. Jack and his second lieutenant, Rob Ransom, in their storm jackets, peered a little anxiously through the scudding masses of vapor.

"I trust we are at a safe enough distance yet from the coast," said Jack; "but I wish the rack would lift, that we might find out exactly where we are."

"You can't be too sure about our distance from the cape," answered Rob. "It seems to me that during the last forty-eight hours we have covered an enormous stretch. Remember we have been going most of the time at the rate of thirteen knots."

"Ay, but much less now is our speed, owing to the south-east current, which is strong enough here to take three knots off our headway, as we have lately learned by the log."

"What is Mandara doing there forward?" inquired Rob. "He has good ears and he stands with his head inclined to the eastward."

As Rob spoke the Mashona came bounding aft.

"Mandara has heard the roar of the surf!" he cried. "We are close upon the coast!"

"It cannot be!" cried Jack, aghast.

"The Mashona can hear well. His ears are trained to listen to the far-off shouts of the Matabele or Masai warriors," answered the youth.

Both Jack and Rob ran forward.

They listened intently, but they could not hear the ominous sounds of which the Mashona had spoken.

"He must have been mistaken," said Jack.

But just then the gale slightly abated, and the vapor lifted ahead.

There was a cry of dismay through the schooner.

A rugged, mountainous coast, fringed with copsewood, loomed directly ahead, not two miles off!

Below, on the sand, the surf was breaking, and the spray seemed to go half way up the sides of the steep cliffs.

Far above, was the broad platform of Table Mountain, with a white mist scudding and rolling over it.

Straight toward this gloomy shore was the schooner being driven.

"We must try the foretopsail, close reefed, and a reefed mainsail!" cried Jack.

"She may stand it," said Rob, "but it is doubtful."

"Aloft there, boys, and loosen and double reef the foretopsail!" roared Jack, through the trumpet.

The men promptly obeyed.

Then the schooner was kept off.

For several moments it seemed as if she could not stand this additional canvas.

She rolled and plunged, with avalanches of water sweeping her decks.

But she flew on, though her masts cracked and her rigging bent inward like a bow.

Nearer to the end of the rugged, rocky peninsula did she draw every second.

But it was doubtful if she would weather it.

Jack finally crept out on the jib-boom with an ax in his hand.

It was evident the schooner would clear the end of the peninsula but for her flying jib-boom.

This it seemed likely would catch in a rocky crevice, in which case the craft would swing broadside on the rocks and be dashed to fragments in a moment.

Jack, therefore, was going to make the perilous attempt to cut the boom clear and thus save his vessel.

It was a dangerous feat, and he had resolved to attempt it himself rather than risk the life of another.

Raising the ax he cut at the spar.

He gave a few blows and it fell dangling by the fore to-gallant stay.

The schooner made a tremendous plunge and down went the boom to which the young captain clung.

Buried to his neck in the water, he must have been washed off, had not Rob Ransom, who had gone out after him when he saw what he meant to do, seized him by the scruff of the neck and held on to him.

But the dangling, severed boom now struck against Rob, and both boys would thus have gone overboard to perish had it not been for Mandara, the Mashona.

This daring youth, accustomed to lassoing some of the wild beasts of his native land, dexterously hurled a rope with a noose at the end, so that it caught about the breasts of both the young sailors.

"Haul—haul!" shouted Mandara, with the rope in his hands, as he gave a perilous, backward leap clean over the knight-head of the deck.

The crew had hold of the rope in a second, and the two boys were quickly yanked up to the boom.

Using the rope for a life-line, they now easily crept along the boom to the deck, where they were greeted with a hearty cheer by the sailors.

Jack's perilous feat saved the schooner.

She went booming past the dangerous extremity of the peninsula, and, in a short time, she was headed up into False Bay, where, sheltered from the gale, she was safely anchored.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEATH WARNING.

It was some hours past noon when the Mary Bell dropped her anchor.

There were several other vessels in the bay, but they could not be plainly seen on account of a mist that overhung the water.

Presently the harbor-master came aboard, and after making the usual inquiries, and learning that the young captain intended to procure a fresh supply of provisions from Simonstown ere he sailed, the visitor left the vessel.

He was not long gone when the fog cleared, revealing the other vessels in the harbor.

The Mary Bell lay in Simon's Bay, on the west side of the great False Bay, and Rob Ransom looked about him with much interest at the lofty, rugged hills, the highest of which towered up about 1,400 feet above the water, and at the town beyond, with its dockyard buildings, on the steep acclivity of a hill.

Further off were green gardens, and in some places the mountain-heath shone as bright as emerald, while thousands of beautiful wild purple geraniums grew in thick clusters on the hillsides.

"Yahoo! yahoo!" suddenly cried the Mashona. "There she is—the pirate—the Red Moon!"

"What?" inquired Jack, somewhat startled.

"The Arab pirate—the Red Moon! The Mashona has seen her before; he knows her well."

Mandara as he spoke stood upon the rail holding on to the main-shrouds and pointing to an Arab dory not four ships' lengths off.

She was a small schooner, low in the water, but with a width of yards which showed her capable of carrying a great breadth of canvas.

Several lean, dusky men aft, wearing low, red caps, had their glasses pointed toward the Mashona, whom they seemed to be surveying with great interest.

"Down from there, Mandara," said Jack. "If those fellows are pirates, and you know them, they will recognize you, and so be on their guard. You are sure you have made no mistake?"

"Sure? Yes. Mandara has reason to know the pirate. He it was who attacked him and his men when they were sailing with a load of

gum and ivory for the port of Urban. They took away his ivory and they would have sunk his sloop and killed all his men, had not a war craft hove in sight. They then showed their heels, but they had so cut up the sloop with their shots, that she went down off the coast, and Mandara has been a poor man ever since, for he could not get money enough to buy another vessel."

"We will go ashore and see the harbor-master about this pirate," said Jack. "Doubtless he has pretended to be a peaceful trader, but we will soon enlighten the official about the fellow's true character."

The young captain had the gig lowered, and he and the Mashona set out for the town.

At the same time it was also noticed that the Arab lowered a small boat and started for the shore.

The crew were evil-looking fellows. They rowed so swiftly that they reached the shore some minutes before Jack, and disappeared in a cove among the rocks.

Jack's boat struck the beach about a hundred yards from where the other one had been seen to vanish.

The captain and his companion, the Mashona, landed at one end of the town, where there were two steep cliffs forming a deep ravine, between which a stream came rushing down from the mountains.

"If we cross the cliff before us we will make a short cut to the harbor-master's quarters," said Jack.

"Ay!" answered the Mashona; "it is the nearest way."

It was now nearly dusk, and as the two ascended the cliff the shadows of projecting rocks added to the obscurity. The two had reached the summit of the cliff when a loose rock gave way under Mandara's feet, and he fell a distance of about twelve feet upon the platform of a ledge overlooking the ravine.

He landed upon his feet on a bed of green heath, and was not hurt. But ere he could climb back to rejoin the young captain the sharp report of a pistol rang out, and a bullet whizzed close to Mandara's head.

The startled youth then saw the top of a red cap as it was hastily withdrawn into a hollow of the cliff some ten yards beyond him.

Heedless of Jack's call for him to wait until he rejoined him, the Mashona, drawing the dagger with which he was armed, ran toward the hollow.

He found it to be a cave extending a few feet inward. The cave was now dark, but Mandara boldly entered it.

A moment later a strong hand grasped him by the wrist of the hand that held the dagger.

He saw a pair of fierce eyes glaring at him, and the muzzle of a pistol was pressed to his forehead.

"Dog of a Mashona, I know you, and you would betray me! But you shall not live to do so. Both you and the Christian shall never return to your craft. I will kill you both, and then I will sail the Red Moon, under cover of the night, out of the harbor."

With these words he pulled the trigger, but, fortunately, the pistol did not go off.

The Arab uttered a cry of impatience, and with a blow on the youth's head with the butt of the weapon, he laid him senseless at his feet.

He was about to finish his work with a dagger he drew from his belt, when the nimble young captain arrived much sooner than the pirate had expected.

"Surrender, you villain!" cried Jack, pointing a pistol at the fellow's head, which he could indistinctly make out in the gloom.

"No, dog, I will not surrender!" fiercely answered the pirate. "Go your way, and meddle not with Madeb's officer, who fears neither man nor devil!"

"Give yourself up to me or you die!" said Jack, firmly.

"You dare not fire," was the reply. "Lower your pistol, or by the great prophet, I will put my dagger in the Mashona's heart."

Fearful that he would carry out his threat, the young captain lowered his pistol.

Scarcely had he done so, when, with a panther-like spring, the pirate came toward him, aiming a blow at him with his dagger.

Jack avoided it by a side movement, and, unable to recover his balance, the Arab went over the edge of the rocky platform. To save himself from going, he had seized the schooner's captain by the cuff of the jacket.

The youth vainly strove to resist the violent pull of the falling man. He was drawn over the ledge, and both fell together into the swiftly rushing stream of the ravine, forty feet below this point.

It was a terrible fall.

But Jack struck deep water, clear of the few rocky obstructions in the torrent.

Not so the Arab.

His side came in contact with a rock, and as Jack rose to the surface by the man's side, he saw his eyes rolling in the spasm of death.

But even in that dreadful moment the pirate did not forego his desire for vengeance.

He had held on to his knife, and now, as he was borne along by the rushing torrent, he gave one last savage leap half out of water, striking full at his companion's back between the shoulders, that he might deal him a sure blow.

But Jack, quickly rolling over, avoided the stroke, and now, as he was borne on, he could at times see the dead man's face close to him in the foaming waters.

The boy was a good swimmer. He kept his head above the surface as he was whirled along, and presently he found himself at the mouth of the stream.

The branch of a tree extending outward afforded him a hold and he drew himself to land.

Not long was he there when he saw the crew of the boat from the Red Moon pulling something out of the water.

It was now too dark for him to see distinctly, but he doubted not the men had discovered the pirate's dead body and were drawing it into their craft.

A moment later they were rowing swiftly toward their vessel.

Jack was about to return toward the cave where he had left Mandara lying senseless, when he saw a form approaching.

"Who is that?" he called.

"It is I—the Mashona!" was the answer.

He soon rejoined the young captain.

He had recovered his senses and had looked for Jack.

Not seeing him, he had thought it best to return to the boat.

He said he felt as well as ever, except that his head still pained a little from the blow he had received.

"We must lose no time in seeing the harbor-master and reporting what has happened. The dow must not be allowed to escape. Those Arab pirates are great nuisances to our merchantmen."

The two again mounted the cliff, and finally reaching the harbor-master's quarters in the town, they made their report.

"Will you assist us," the surprised official inquired of Jack, "by keeping the fellow from leaving the harbor until we can bring out a force to capture him?"

"Certainly," answered the young captain.

As quickly as possible he returned to the Mary Bell.

A mist had again fallen upon the water, and in the deep obscurity the Red Moon could not be seen.

All at once Jack noticed a dark, gliding object stealthily passing close to his stern.

"That must be the schooner," he said. "She has slipped her cable and is stealing off."

"Ay—ay!" answered the Mashona, who had eyes like a cat's, "it is the pirate."

"Schooner ahoy!" shouted the captain, through his speaking trumpet. "Heave to, or we will sink you!"

Not a word came in response.

Silently the phantom-like shadow was kept on.

Jack had pointed a gun at the vessel, but ere he could fire, there was a bright flash, followed by the roar of a broadside from the Red Moon's small guns.

The shots were meant for a raking fire, but in the gloom they had been aimed too far to starboard to hit the Mary Bell, and they went humming harmlessly past.

Jack sighted the after gun as well as he could in the darkness and fired.

The roar of the piece was followed by the crash of woodwork, indicating that he had done some damage.

But presently a yell of derision was heard and he knew that the pirate was slipping out of the bay.

Some minutes later a faint voice was heard from alongside:

"Help, Christian, help!"

A lantern was thrust over the rail, and Jack saw the dark, uplifted face of a wounded and evidently dying Arab clinging to a broken spar.

The man was helped aboard and laid on the deck.

Jack gave him brandy.

"No use," he said. "Your shot has killed Marlok. I was on the jib-boom when it came. It carried away the boom and struck me in the side. I have but a few moments to live, and I have a warning to give you—the son of Captain Howland, looking for your lost father."

He gasped for breath while Jack cried out:

"Know you anything of the lost craft?"

"I have nothing to say about that," answered the dying Arab.

"But you have been kind to me, who was one forced to join the pirates against his will, and I will warn you. Try not to find the gold queen of the Haunted Lake. 'Tis Madeb of the Red Moon who covets that treasure, and he will find means to destroy you and your craft if you seek the mysterious lake."

With these words the man expired.

CHAPTER V.

STRANDED IN A CAVE.

JACK could not imagine how the man who had just died had come to know that he was to seek his father's lost craft until he remembered that he had noticed a boat containing Arabs going slowly past the schooner while he was talking to the harbor-master about his intention of trying to find some trace of his parent.

These Arabs must have belonged to the pirate crew and they had overheard what he said.

The harbor-master came aboard about a quarter of an hour after the pirate's death, when Jack informed him of the escape of the Red Moon.

"I am sorry enough he escaped," said the official. "He is reported to be a desperate character, and I fear he will give you much trouble especially as you have now made him your enemy."

"The Mary Bell can be in no danger from a craft like his," answered Howland.

"I am not sure of that. The fellow is like a serpent. He has secret ways of doing mischief. Besides, he is in league with some of the natives."

A few hours later the dead pirate was taken ashore and buried.

For some years a rude stone marked his grave but it is now gone. Jack remained in Simons Bay a few days, during which he took in a fresh supply of provisions and water.

Then, on a bright, clear morning, he again set sail, running up the American flag and firing a gun as he left the harbor.

On went the Mary Bell. Careful lookouts were kept posted, but no sign of the pirate dow was seen.

Passing Dalgoa Bay, in due time, the long flat-topped ridge of Reuben Point, two hundred feet high, with the red earth on its sides fairly seeming to gleam in the sunlight, was observed by the crew, while the fragrance of the rich vegetation on its summit was wafted out to sea.

And now the schooner was off the coast of Mozambique, and the eyes of the Mashona gleamed brightly as he again beheld his native shores.

Carefully did he pilot the craft among the reefs and sandbanks which were finally encountered.

At last, one morning, he pointed out to Jack a long, rugged rock that rose above the sea.

"There is where the Monmouth, your father's ship, was last seen," he remarked, indicating a spot about twenty fathoms to the northward of the rock.

"Can it be that the ship ran upon this rock in the fog?" said Howland.

"That was never known. But the Mashonas think she foundered in some way with all on board."

"That hardly seems likely," answered the youth. "It was not rough weather at the time, and a few if not all would have escaped by means of the boats, even had she gone down, as good lookouts are generally kept aboard a gun-ship."

Then near the rock the young captain had the schooner hove to.

"How deep may the water be here, Mashona?" he inquired.

"It is reckoned at five fathoms," was the reply.

The lead was cast, and it was found that Mandara's estimate of the depth had been correct.

On attempting to haul up the lead the man over the side uttered a cry of surprise.

"What is the matter?" inquired Jack.

"True as I'm a living man, sir, there's something or some one a-pullin' on this line under water!" the sailor answered, with a sort of superstitious terror.

"Impossible!" cried Jack.

He seized the line.

"You are right!" he cried, aghast. "What does it mean?"

"Are you sure?" inquired Rob Ransom.

"Ay, take hold of the line yourself and you'll see there can be no mistake about that!"

Rob, grasping the line, felt a tug at it under the sea.

All the watch came crowding to the rail.

"This must be looked into," said Jack.

"May it not be a fish that has hold of the lead or of the line?" said Rob.

"It is no fish," answered Howland. "Those creatures don't pull like that."

The young captain took off his hat, jacket and shoes.

"I am going down to look into the strange affair," he said. "Fortunately I am a good diver and swimmer."

"So am I," said Rob, "and I will go with you."

The first lieutenant, an elderly sailor named Joseph Transom, tried to dissuade the boys from going.

"There are sharks about here, and you peril your lives by diving."

"I must run some risk in my father's cause," Jack replied.

"Somehow, I have a notion that this singular occurrence is connected with the lost ship."

Several nimble young seamen advanced and said they would go in place of Jack and Rob.

"Thank you, lads," answered the former, "but this is an affair which I would rather investigate in my own person."

He and Rob dove down into the depths.

They kept their eyes open under the water.

Suddenly they saw a long, spotted serpent—a creature with a white body, dotted and striped with gray, and a flat head, in which were sharp, crooked teeth, making toward them.

Jack knew this to be a species of hydrus—a dangerous animal to swimmers.

It twines, with the rapidity of lightning, about the throat of its intended victim, choking and strangling him, ere it fastens its fangs in his flesh.

In an instant the young captain drew his sword, which he had taken the precaution to bring with him.

As the coils of the creature, like rings of light, darted towards him, he made a blow at it with his weapon.

The keen edge of the blade partly cut the serpent, which then swam off, but the next moment it returned to the attack, its little diamond-like eyes fairly red with fury.

The two boys now had been long enough under water to render it necessary for them to come up for a supply of fresh air.

Half suffocated by their long submersion, both were powerless to make use of their swords.

They were far down in the depths, and they knew that before they could reach the surface the serpent must make a victim of one of them.

But now it chanced that, looking towards the side of the rock under

the sea, Jack saw the end of a boat-hook projecting from a large hole in it.

This, twisted about the lead-line, was what had been used to pull upon it, causing so much surprise amongst the crew of the schooner.

It so happened that both the swimmers saw the boat-hook, and having pointed towards it, Jack swam for it, followed by Rob Ransom.

The boys seized it, when, as they had judged would be the case, they were drawn upward into a water cave in the rock.

Quickly were they pulled up to the surface of the water in the cave.

Then on a projecting ledge or platform they beheld an old sailor. They got upon the rugged platform and looked with the utmost surprise at the man. He was nearly seventy—had a white beard, a dark, fallow skin and gray, round eyes.

He was habited in a rough jacket and trousers, and looked like a Maltese. The light through a fissure in the rock fell upon his face and form and upon a round cap on his head.

Upon this cap Jack, to his unbounded surprise, read in gilt letters the word, Monmouth—the name of his father's lost ship!

As the sailor placed the boat-hook with which he had drawn the boys up against the side of the cave, he said in a low, hollow voice:

"At last those have come who would rescue me from my gloomy, dreadful situation—at last, after nearly two long years!"

"You have been here almost two years, and you are one of the crew of the Monmouth?" cried Jack, as soon as he could regain breath to speak.

"It is true. In this horrible gloomy dungeon have I remained all that time, and now just as I have made my position known I am going to die!"

"Die? No, you seem well enough, though you are thin and worn," said Jack. "We will have you aboard the schooner and make you as strong as you ever were."

But the old seaman shook his head.

"It may not be, maty," he said, in his hollow voice. "My time has come. I have for lack of other provision just partaken of what will presently put an end to me."

He drew a bunch of weeds from his pocket.

"This is a deadly poison," he said, "and I have eaten of it. Terrible has been my situation," he continued, pointing to the crevice in the upper part of the steep, smooth side of the rock, too far up for any human being to climb without a ladder. "Through that crack have I, now and then, caught sight of different craft, but all have kept too far away to hear me through these thick walls when I shouted. Awhile ago your vessel came closer to the rock than I have ever seen any other do. But my voice is now become so weak that I could not make myself heard, even at so short a distance. I saw a man heave the lead, as the side of your schooner swung up to view through the crevice, so I resolved to try and make my presence here known by tugging at the lead-line."

"There is a hole in the rock six feet under the surface, through which I thrust the hook, and was fortunate enough to feel and catch the line, at which I tugged. At length, I felt you pulling at the boat-hook, and so I drew you up. Now, before I die, I will tell you about the Monmouth."

Jack listened eagerly, and so did Rob, as the old sailor went on:

"The Monmouth lay near this rock in a fog. The captain—Captain Howland, had heard of a certain lake called the Haunted Lake by the natives of this coast, said to contain at the bottom of it a gold image of a queen. The captain, anxious to procure, if possible, so great a treasure and curiosity had gone up the Zambesi river, with a native to pilot him to the lake, taking with him fifty armed men, with boats and provisions. There were fifty of us left aboard the ship, and we were to cruise about the coast until his return."

"He had been gone about a week when one foggy day—I don't know the cause of it, but I think we must have been drugged by some traitor aboard the ship—we all complained of feeling strangely drowsy. It was just after dinner—after we had drunk some coffee. First the lookouts dropped to sleep and then one man after the other, myself among the rest. What took place while we were thus asleep I know not. I was awakened by feeling myself going down in the sea with a heavy piece of iron attached to my ankle by a rope. It must have been clumsily tied, for just as I had given up all hope it slipped off. A current carried me into this cave, and here I have remained ever since. What became of all my shipmates or of the ship I know not!"

CHAPTER VI.

A DEATH TRAP.

"A STRANGE and mysterious affair," said Jack. "The ship must have been attacked, and perhaps she may have been destroyed and all her crew killed."

"I am inclined to think so," answered the old sailor. "Several dead bodies of my mates were washed up into this cave, afterwards, to soon be dragged down by sharks."

"Why did not you leave the cave?" inquired Rob Ransom. "Why did you stay in such a place?"

"Because my legs were partly paralyzed. I think the scoundrels, whoever they were, that sunk me, must have hurled me against the rock and hurt me, when they threw me overboard, and that had something to do with waking me."

"But how have you lived? What have you had to eat and drink?" asked Jack.

"The day after I was carried into this place," answered the sailor, "I noticed the end of a boat-hook sticking above the surface of the

water. I pulled upon it and felt something heavy at the bottom of it. After much hard tugging I drew up a large, iron-bound box, with a rope caught about it in which the prong of the boat-hook was twisted. I found this box to contain preserved meats and bottles of cider, enough to last me more than eighteen months if carefully used. My belief is that in plundering the ship, the persons who had boarded her—for all this would seem to prove she must have been boarded—somehow lost their grip of the box, which went overboard and sank. They tried to recover it with the boat-hook, but for some reason failed, and the instrument went down with the box."

"Carried by the current, the box was caught on the lower edge of the hole under water in the rock in such a position that the boat-hook projected slantingly upward above the surface, thus enabling me to grasp it. A few days ago I partook of the last of my provisions, and to-day, in a starving condition, I ate of these weeds, which I had once gathered ashore and kept in my pockets. I feel their effects, and I know I have not long to live."

The old sailor's eyes rolled wildly. He threw himself down, and was soon seized with spasms and convulsions.

"We will try to get you aboard the schooner. I have a good doctor there who will attend to you," said Jack.

But even as he spoke, the aged seaman gave a few short gasps, and then, with one dreadful cry, plunged headlong from the rocky platform into the water.

"We must try to save him," said Rob.

"Ay, he may not be so badly off as he thinks. Our doctor might cure him!" cried Jack.

Both boys dove beneath the surface.

They came to the hole in the rock, swam through it, but they saw nothing of the old sailor.

As they were rising toward the surface of the sea, however, they beheld an awful sight.

The hydnus or spotted serpent Jack had previously wounded was making off, dragging the dead body of the sailor along, with its horrid coil twisted about his breast.

A few moments later the boys came up close to their schooner, to behold many anxious faces watching them over the starboard rail.

They boarded the vessel and told their story to many wondering listeners.

"Such," concluded Jack, "is the strange unexpected result of our dive. It proves that foul play is mixed up with the loss of the Monmouth, and I think it also proves that my father and the men he took with him may be living, though, for some singular reason, they are unable to get back to the sea. One thing I am determined on, which is to go to the Haunted Lake, as it is called, and there look for my lost father."

He delivered a short address to the crew, making known his intention, and there was not one who showed the least reluctance to accompanying him.

The Mashona, Mandara, looked gloomy and sorrowful, but he said:

"Be it so. I will pilot you to the lake, but meddle not with the gold image," he added, in a solemn voice, "or your doom is certain."

"We will see about that," said Jack. "The first thing to do is to find my father, if possible."

The schooner was then headed for the mouth of the Zambesi river, which she reached a few hours later.

Up the river she glided, with Mandara as pilot. For several days she had a fair wind, but her progress was slow on account of the current.

Here and there a thick jungle composed of mimosa, aloes and other lofty trees, with numberless pines and close shrubbery were seen on the banks of the river.

Ugly crocodiles would now and then thrust their long jaws from the water, as if to dispute the passage of the vessel, and the form of the huge hippopotamus would at times appear on some muddy point of land, or be seen as it retreated crashing into the shrubbery.

At night the distant roar of some wandering lion, the scream of the panther and the strange cry of the hyena would be heard.

Ostriches, peacocks, spotted hens, geese and other creatures of the kind seemed to abound in this locality.

On went the Mary Bell, and finally she entered a narrower river, which branched off to the north and west, and which Mandara said led to the Haunted Lake.

The banks of this river were thickly wooded on both sides.

The navigation was easy under the guidance of the Mashona, until a river flowed among a lofty range of cliffs, when obstructing rocks had to be carefully avoided.

All at once, as the vessel was passing under a steep wooded cliff, Jack, who was aloft with his glass, was sure he saw the masts of another schooner rising above a high rock a short distance off the starboard bow.

He pointed it out to Rob Ransom, who was aloft with him.

"What craft can that be?" he asked the Mashona, who now came up the rigging.

Mandara shook his head.

"Sometimes there are Portuguese craft about here," he said, "but I don't like the looks of those masts. There is too much rake to them."

"You think it is a pirate?" said Jack.

"Ay, and I fear it is the Red Moon—the dow of the Arab, Ma-deb."

"If so, we will make short work of it. The rascal has no business here. We will batter him to pieces with our guns."

Scarcely had he spoken when a bright flash lighted the woodland

on the summit of the height, under which the schooner was passing, and a shot came whizzing down, striking the water close to the bow of the Mary Bell.

"The pirates!" cried Mandara. "They must have a breastwork up there, provided with a gun."

A minute later another shot was fired.

This struck the schooner's taffrail, shattering a portion of it to splinters.

"There is but one gun. We will go up there and attack the rascals," said Jack.

He called for six volunteers, who quickly presented themselves.

The young captain had them armed with pistols and cutlasses.

Then the schooner was hove to alongside a high rock, with a rope fast to a projecting spar, and moving along a rugged ledge, Jack, with Rob Ransom and the men, reached the base of the height.

Shot after shot was fired at them from the small gun above as they advanced, but they were partly screened by projecting masses, so that not one of them was hit.

"There it is—there is the breastwork partly masked by the shrubbery," said Rob Ransom, as he and Jack gained the summit of the cliff.

They could see the gun—a small ten-pounder, but not a soul was visible near it.

The party crept along behind a ridge until within ten yards of the breastwork, when, drawing his sword, Jack shouted:

"Now, men, follow me, and we will soon be upon the rascals! They are probably crouching out of sight behind the breastwork!"

With a shout the men closely followed Jack and Rob as they darted toward the breastwork—the front of which was apparently almost on the edge of the height.

"Halloa! there is no one here!" cried Rob, as the two boys sprang up on the work.

"Ay, they have made off, but they have spiked the gun!" said Jack, as he scrutinized the piece.

The men came over the breastwork as Jack and Rob moved some yards off, to look if they could see anything of their enemies.

There was a narrow path leading down to the foot of the height on the side opposite to that they had ascended.

Looking along this path they caught sight of half a dozen Arabs, who were pushing off in a boat at the bottom of the cliff.

"There they go!" cried Jack, "and—"

He was interrupted by a tremendous explosion.

The air was for a moment full of flame and smoke and flying fragments of rock.

One awful simultaneous shriek was heard.

It came from the six men who had remained by the breastwork, and whose mangled forms were sent flying upward and outward from the edge of the cliff, to fall far below into the river, whence they would never rise again in life.

"Great God! my poor lads!" cried Jack.

"Ay, the scoundrels must have lighted a mine in some hollow near the breastwork, ere we came up," said Rob.

Just then the rock upon which he and Jack stood, loosened by the shock of the explosion, gave way and went crashing down the side of the cliff.

Both boys threw out their arms as they fell and clutched the projecting branch of a small tree, growing from a fissure in the side of the cliff.

To this branch they clung.

It was a slender one and cracked with their weight.

There they hung, about seven feet below the top of the cliff, and a hundred and fifty feet above the water, where directly beneath them were sharp rocks, upon which should they fall they would be dashed to death. On this side the lofty elevation was too smooth and steep either to climb or descend.

"Quick, Rob, draw yourself into the trunk of the tree, which will bear our weight," said Jack.

Ransom went in hand over hand to the trunk, followed by his companion.

It was a slender tree and it bent under the twain. Should there come up a violent storm there was no doubt that the frail trunk would give way.

From their position the boys could now see a part of the schooner and some of the men aboard.

Jack was about to shout to make their position known to these men, who were moving to and fro in great confusion, when suddenly the voice of the first lieutenant was heard giving an order to fire.

The roar of a gun shook the air.

Then there was a wild, fierce yell, and a party of about sixty Arab pirates were seen to board the schooner.

CHAPTER VII.

ROB RANSOM'S FATE.

EVIDENTLY the Arabs whom Jack and Rob saw board the schooner had suddenly come to view in their boats round the edge of the rock to which the Mary Bell was moored.

The gun which the lieutenant had fired, had probably not done any execution, owing to his not being able, on account of the nearness of the pirates, to depress it sufficiently to hit them.

Over the rails, fore and aft, poured the fierce band.

Their dark faces and their wild, bright eyes bore a look of exultation as they sprang aboard, headed by a tall chief, who was probably the person called Madeb.

The low, red caps, the sashes about their sailor trousers, containing daggers and pistols, and the ferocious aspect of their long, dark faces, gave the party a formidable appearance.

"Too bad—too bad!" cried Jack, despairingly. "The lieutenant should have kept a better lookout. There are but twenty-nine men aboard that craft, opposed to those fifty scoundrels. God help them!"

"Ay, it is too bad," said Rob, "since there are guns enough there to have scattered the gang had there been a chance to use them."

The yells of the pirate horde now were heard, as they rushed to the attack.

There was a clashing of swords and the sharp report of small arms for awhile, as the crew resisted.

The latter were evidently driven aft, as the boys could not long see the combatants, owing to the projection of the rock.

Then there rose a wild, triumphant yell, and the next moment an Arab flag, with the crescent moon and a star, went dancing up to the gall.

"She is captured. The Mary Bell is lost to us!" said Jack, aghast. A few minutes after he spoke, the sails of the schooner were spread, and she disappeared round the rock from the gaze of the two boys.

"Ay, there she goes," said Rob. "What are we to do now?"

A determined flash lighted Jack's eyes.

"I will yet recapture my vessel," he said.

Rob shook his head.

"Easier said than done, I am afraid," he answered.

"The Haunted Lake cannot be far off," said Jack. "We must try to reach it, and there, I trust, we will find my father and his men."

Rob looked a little sadly at the speaker.

It seemed to him that, in his present excited state, his friend spoke without weighing his words.

"Your father, if he is there, must himself be in trouble—unable, for some reason, to leave the place," he remarked, "otherwise he would, ere now, have gone back to the coast."

"If he is in trouble, I am confident we will be able to rescue him from it," said Jack.

Though Rob naturally doubted this, he would say nothing to discourage the young captain, but he could not help thinking he was the most sanguine person he had ever met with.

He, however, said:

"In the first place, how are we to leave this tree, Jack?"

"That we can do, I think," answered Jack, taking from his pocket a small coil of ratline. "Lucky it is I have this. I had put it in my pocket, ere we left the schooner, thinking it might be used in case of our wanting to ascend some difficult part of the cliff, while advancing to attack the breastwork."

He unfastened the coil.

It was about fifteen feet long, and the youth now looked above him for some projection over which it might be thrown.

"There," said Bob, pointing out a sharp spur of the rock a little to the left, "that is the only chance and it seems to me it is too far off."

"We can fetch it," answered the hopeful boy.

He made a slip-noose at one end and hurled it.

But this first throw was unsuccessful.

He tried many times without success.

The rope in fact was a trifle too short to be thrown so far.

At length Bob hit upon a perilous expedient.

"I will lean far over from the tree," he said, "and let you hold me while I hurl the rope," he said.

"Too dangerous for you," said Jack. "I am the one to try it, as it was I who proposed using the rope."

A slight friendly dispute was finally ended by Jack having his own way.

He leaned far over, while Rob kept a firm clutch of the jacket of his collar behind.

The young captain at the first throw of the rope got the noose about the projection. But the jar he gave the tree caused the roots to loosen.

It seemed about to give way, and at the same time Jack's collar ripping partly off in Rob's grasp, the boy would have been precipitated headlong from his lofty height, had not Rob shifted his hold to his lair and given him a quick pull toward the tree.

"Good!" cried Jack, half laughing, "though it seemed as if you were hauling my head off."

Crack! crack! went the roots of the tree.

"Quick!" continued Jack. "There is no time to lose. We must seize the rope together."

They did so and left the tree just as it gave way and went crashing down the cliff.

Jack went up first to give Rob room to follow.

It was easy enough for these two sailors to reach the top of the cliff by means of the rope.

They were soon upon it, and then as Jack coiled the rope and replaced it in his pocket, he said:

"Now, then, for the Haunted Lake."

"The Mashona said it was in sight from any lofty elevation," remarked Rob. "Can you see it?—I cannot."

The boys looked far ahead through openings among the mountains. Jack was keen of sight.

Presently he pointed out a hazy looking strip far in the distance, half veiled by a blue mist.

"I think that's it," he said.

"Ay," answered Rob, "it may be, and then again it may be only a strip of vapor."

"We will hope for the best," said Jack.

"But how are we going to reach it?" inquired Rob. "We have no boat."

"We can lash together a sort of log-raft, which will be strong enough to bear us," answered Jack.

As he spoke his gaze fell upon a painted waterproof bag, and he ran to it.

He unfastened the end and discovered that the bag contained some roughly baked cakes of maize, which had probably been used for food by the men of the breastwork, and which, owing to its position so far back, had escaped destruction when the explosion took place.

With this treasure the boys descended the cliff on the same side by which they had come up.

The cliff was partly composed of granite and partly of earth, which latter contained some trees.

The roots of many of these had but a loose hold of the ground.

By hard pushing the boys dislodged a couple of them.

These with their swords they finally lopped of their branches and cut the requisite length.

Then, with the ratline, they fastened the logs thus made ready into a small raft.

There were five logs, but the rope was not long enough to hold them very firmly together.

"They will do if we are not dashed by some torrent against a rock," said Rob.

"Ay, but it is not likely we will meet with any torrent," answered hopeful Jack.

"The Mashona said there was one ahead," remarked Rob. "I hope, though, we will be able to avoid it."

The boys got upon the raft and tied the bag of cakes to it.

The current against them was not very strong, and by means of rude paddles, which they had shaped out with their swords, they contrived to make some progress.

Their work had occupied many hours.

It was now late in the afternoon.

They finally paddled the raft to a pleasant grove on a hill that sloped to the water and there they paused for rest.

Though they had kept a careful watch, they had, as yet, seen nothing either of the Mary Bell or of the Arab dhow.

Jack spoke sadly of the fate of his vessel.

"We will hope, however," he remarked, "that such of the crew as were not killed during the combat have not been put to the sword."

Rob said he hoped not, but he feared they had.

The boys were now hungry.

There were some wild geese near the river side, and Jack, having loaded his pistol, shot one. A number of decayed branches of an old fallen tree afforded the means of making a fire, and it was while procuring these that the boys discovered a store of honey in the hollow of the tree.

Here was an unexpected luxury.

They lighted their fire with matches Jack had in a safe, and having prepared the goose they roasted it.

With this and some of the maize cakes dipped in the honey they made a good meal.

Then Jack lighted the briar pipe which, with tobacco, he had always carried about him, and sat smoking, while he and Rob talked over their strange situation.

Night closed around them and they finally thought of sleep.

They resolved to take turns at watching.

Jack had the first watch while Rob slept.

The night was dark, and the gloom was but slightly relieved by the half moon, which was visible through openings among the cliffs.

All at once Jack fancied he heard a splash in the water not far off.

As he surmised, it was a crocodile, which had plunged from the bank.

He could dimly see the dark body of the monster as it swam along for awhile and then disappeared beneath the surface.

While was watching the water to see if it reappeared he was startled by a cry from Rob Ransom, whom he had left in his slumber about ten yards off.

To his horror he beheld his friend being dragged along toward the river by a crocodile—probably the same monster he had previously seen.

He ran toward the imperiled youth, but ere he could reach him he saw Rob drawn into the river by the crocodile, which then disappeared with him beneath the surface.

CHAPTER VIII;

A SINGULAR DISGUISE.

For a few seconds horror and dismay held Jack motionless.

"Lost—lost!" he exclaimed. "How strangely sudden it happened!" Scarcely had he spoken, when to his surprise he again heard the cries of his friend.

They were blended with a loud splashing behind a rock near the bank.

In a moment Jack had his sword in his hand.

"Not too late yet to help him!" he thought.

He dashed into the shallow water and got round to the other side of the rock.

There he dimly beheld a singular spectacle.

The crocodile seemed to hold Rob in a tight embrace, while the youth was vainly striving to free himself.

Jack was about to make a thrust at the creature, when, to his utter astonishment, the skin of the crocodile dropped off, and, with a loud

"hugh! hugh!" a human being of hideous aspect whom it had concealed, sprang to his feet, letting go his hold of the boy!

Rob Ransom rose at the same time, and both he and Jack gazed with surprise at the singular being before them.

The man, for such he was, was naked with the exception of a piece of kid skin twined about the middle of his body.

His face was broad, black, and his huge nose was flattened, while his fierce eyes had a half-shut appearance. He had a large mouth, with thick lips and broad, sharp teeth and his coarse hair hung down like a mass of weeds from his head, and over his forehead and temples, partly hiding a pair of huge earrings. From neck to heel he was plastered with red clay and grease.

"Hugh! not use sword! Me not want hurt! Put up sword, or, if must fight, give Masai warrior one chance!"

As he spoke the fellow sprang to a hollow in the rock and drew therefrom an immense, oblong buffalo shield and an enormous spear, the latter having a blade about two and a half feet long.

This blade, which seemed to be made of the best steel, was like that of a sword bayonet, except that it was straight and very broad, and was sharp at both edges, as well as at the point.

In the hands of this gigantic warrior it was, indeed, a most formidable weapon.

"So you are a Masai warrior?" said Jack. "How came you so far south, if you are? I thought all the Masai people were all in Zanzibar, and that they kept away from the whites and could not speak English."

The Masai warriors are strong of foot, and a hundred miles have they travelled for revenge. Me have seen white missionary, and many of my tribe have learn Englees. Not first time this me see whites."

"And why have you attacked my friend? Answer quickly, and try not to use that spear against us, or I will cut you down!"

A hideous grin convulsed the big, ugly face of the Masai.

"Me make mistake. Masai not see very well in dark, while have crocodile skin to make look like crocodile, and think boy one of Madeb's pirates going to drown him under water, but when hear him cry out in Englees, me know him was a white, and so not want to drown or hurt. But him fight me with fists, and so me hold tight. Hugh! hugh!"

"And so you disguised yourself in the crocodile skin in order to make way with one you thought was an enemy?"

"Yes, me steal along in dark. Me not see well in dark, and think him enemy—one of Arab pirates."

"And what have the pirates done to you that you are so much against them?"

"Masai not want tell white boy too much. Pirate have fire guns at Masais. That is enough. Been kill some of Masais, and so want revenge."

Naturally enough, Jack now conceived an idea of making use of the Masai man to recover his vessel.

"How many warriors have you, and where are they?" he inquired.

"They are near, but the Masai will not tell where," answered the cautious savage. "There are many of them, too."

Then pointing at Jack's uniform, he added:

"You are from ship with guns. Masais want nothing to do with your guns, which can kill them when far off."

"The guns will not be used to hurt those who help me," answered Jack. "Listen, warrior," he added, eagerly, "if you help me get back my vessel from the pirates, you shall have many of these," pointing as he spoke to a large string of red and blue beads about the native's neck.

"Pirates have your ship? How get your ship?"

In a few words Jack told him.

The Masai reflected a moment and then said:

"Taveta will see the chief of the Masais. If he say will help boys, then Taveta will come to boys with all his warriors."

"And where will they join us?"

"By the shore of the wonderful lake, which is twenty miles from here. To that lake the pirates will go. There, if chief willing, the Masais will fight pirates with the white boys. See! Masais know how to fight. What could you do with sword against Taveta?"

With a horrid laugh the savage suddenly covered himself with his enormous buffalo shield, and holding his terrible spear with his right hand, he suddenly, with a movement as quick as lightning, had the point against Jack's breast.

Rob, alarmed, seized his arm and tried to move it to one side, but he might as well have striven to turn a rock.

The savage, with a loud, guttural laugh, then withdrew the spear, and held it vertically, as he had only made the movement by way of illustration.

From the same cavity which had contained his shield and spear he then drew a long steel rod, pointed like a dagger at one end, and with a ball of brass secured to the other.

This implement he flourished about the heads of the boys in a most dexterous manner, now and then touching their skulls with the ball.

Perceiving now that he was simply doing this to show one of the ways of Masai fighting, the young sailors stood unmoved.

"See!" cried Taveta. "Hugh—hugh! Masai great warriors. Who can beat Masais in the fight? Nobody!"

And he laughed as he thrust the ball-headed rod in his belt.

Jack could not help shuddering.

He had heard that the Masai warriors carried instruments termed "brain crushers," and he comprehended that this weapon was one of these.

"Now, boys, go on to the lake, and the Masais may meet them there."

With a short bow and a nod, the man then threw the crocodile skin over his shoulders, sprang ashore, and darted off, disappearing in the gloom.

"Do you think we could depend on those horrid wretches to help us?" inquired Rob.

"It is worth trying."

"Perhaps it is, but we must be on our guard against treachery. The fellows may conclude to kill us."

"Rob," said Jack, "if you think so, I have no right to ask you to go with me to meet those people, and—"

Ransom interrupted him by grasping both his hands.

"I am with you to the death!" he said. "I spoke only to put you on your guard."

"I knew I could depend on you," said Jack, as he returned Rob's grasp. "Glad enough I am to have such a true friend."

The two boys then returned to the place where Rob had reposed when carried off by the disguised Masai, and Jack was soon lying sound asleep, while Ransom watched.

Early next morning, having breakfasted off their maize cakes, they ascended the hill and looked about them.

Still they could see nothing either of the Arab dhow or of their own craft.

"They must be hidden by the cliffs ahead, through which the river flows," said Rob.

"Ay, and we must be careful not to come too suddenly upon them, lest they capture us and so defeat our plans," said Jack.

They betook themselves to their raft again, lashing the bag of cakes to it, and kept on their way.

They had made about ten miles, when, on rounding one of the cliffs, they suddenly saw a rapid torrent that branched off to the right, gliding along with great velocity.

This torrent describing a descent flowed through an opening in a lengthy ridge of cliffs that seemed connected for miles.

To the left the current was the same as the young sailors had previously met with. About a mile off, half veiled by a light mist, they beheld the Arab dhow, heading on her course, with the captured Mary Bell following astern.

Some pirates aboard the latter craft seemed to behold the boys.

An instant later, just as they were caught and carried swiftly along by the torrent, in spite of all their efforts against it, they saw a flash and a puff of smoke as the Mary Bell's stern-chaser was fired.

It had been aimed at them and the shot narrowly missed them.

It struck the end of the raft, knocking three of the logs to pieces.

The boys clung to two of the logs, as the others parted, and there they were, hanging to their frail support, being now swiftly borne along by the torrent.

"This is bad," said Rob. "We know not whither we are being carried. Perhaps to our destruction."

"There is no way we can stop ourselves in this swift torrent," said Jack. "Glad I am, though, that the part of the raft to which our bag of cakes is lashed remains."

"But see, they are training the gun for us again."

Then the pirates sent another shot toward them.

Again they had a narrow escape.

The shot passed directly between them.

"They will fire another," said Rob.

"Bah! I am not afraid of them," answered Jack. "They are bad marksmen, and could not hit the side of a mountain."

A third shot was fired.

It struck the water close to the boys.

Rob uttered a sharp cry.

"You are not hit!" cried Jack, anxiously.

"No," replied Rob, laughing in spite of their perilous situation. "My leg struck an under water rock, and I really thought at first I was hit."

A few moments later they were borne through the archway or opening in the cliff, and were safe from further shots.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GOLD QUEEN.

THE torrent, as stated, had a gradual descent.

The boy's were borne on with a rapidity that almost made them dizzy.

The walls of the rocky cavern or tunnel, through which they were carried, became lower and narrower.

A gloom almost like that of night was around them.

Now and then they were swept close to some rugged, projecting ledge, but so swift was their progress that they had no chance to clutch it to stay their course.

For about two miles they had thus been carried, with openings appearing in the rocky projections above them, when they were borne into a low sort of cave at the base of a conical mountain, wooded with mimosa and other lofty trees.

The cave was dark, but, as their eyes became used to the gloom, they saw the outlines of two great heads and the gleaming of round orbs, which looked like globes of fire.

At the same time a succession of loud roars were heard, which seemed to shake the very walls of the cavern.

"God help us!" cried Rob; "those are lions."

"I am afraid they are," answered Jack. "Draw your sword, Rob. Fortunately we are so lashed to this log by the rope that was left upon it that we can use both arms!"

"Ay," replied Rob. "But what can we do thus tied?"

The boys were now so near the lions that they could make out their forms even in that dim light.

There was the huge male lion, with his enormous head and thick mane, and close to him was his female consort, more smoothly formed, but terrible in her fierce rage.

The twain were on a broad, rocky platform, covered with those beautiful sea-weeds, of a bright, pink color, called "corallines," by seamen, but the real name of which is griffithsia corallina.

The young sailors noticed, to their dismay, that where the lions stood there was a projecting rock, which would probably arrest their progress.

They made every effort to clear it by moving their arms and legs, but they found they could not quite do so.

This would give the lions a chance to attack and probably destroy them before they could clear themselves from the projection, so as to be carried on by the torrent.

Holding their swords firmly, however, they naturally resolved to make a desperate fight for their lives.

The male lion, leaning from the edge of the rocky platform, had his paw upraised to deal each of the boys in turn a blow on the head, which of itself would be sufficient to kill them.

"Stand by, Rob!" yelled Jack. "Let him have it through the neck, while I make a stroke at his upraised foreleg."

An instant later the log struck the projection, though near its extremity.

With a fierce growl the male lion struck at Jack, while the female, thrusting forward its head, tried to seize Rob by the throat.

Jack aimed a swift, powerful stroke at the leg of the male, cutting it clean off, ere the paw could strike him. At the same moment he heard a horrid, crunching sound, followed by a yell from his friend.

Thinking Rob's skull was being crushed by the female, he looked at the youth to perceive that the cry he had uttered was merely one of triumph, as he drove his blade straight through the heart of the lioness, killing her almost instantly.

In his fury the male lion now had half his body on the log, and his great red mouth, with its horrid fangs, was within an inch of Jack's face.

Shortening his grasp of the sword, the boy drove the weapon far down the throat of the huge beast, which, jerking the blade from his hand, then fell over on the rocky platform, uttering roars of blended pain and rage as it was expiring.

"Shove off, Rob. Let us get away from here as soon as we can. This affair has cost me my sword, but it might have had a worse ending," cried Jack.

The log was shoved by the boys from the extremity of the rock, and on it went, with the same velocity as before.

The two soon found themselves in an open space between lofty cliffs.

Then, to their dismay, they perceived that the torrent, a short distance ahead, flowed into a deep hole or pit, that opened at the base of a high, rocky wall.

Should they be carried into that pit their destruction was certain.

Half way to it the long branch of a tree projected from a bank. Could they seize this they might save themselves.

To do so they made every effort in their power.

Another and smaller torrent, diverging from the main one, assisted them.

This, too, had a sharp descent.

They succeeded in clutching the branch as they struck against it, but it gave way in their grasp.

Then they were swept on by the smaller torrent.

It flowed between two steep walls of rock, too smooth to grasp or to climb.

The torrent kept narrowing as they progressed.

At last they saw an opening ahead in a cliff.

Through this they were borne at a much slower speed than before. On they went for about half an hour through a dark sort of tunnel, and then, all at once, they emerged through an opening at the other end, into a broad sheet of water, where there was but a slight current.

"Here we are!" cried Jack. "This must be the place of which the Mashona spoke."

"Ay, we have reached it at last, though in a way we little expected," said Rob. "We are adrift in the Haunted Lake!"

The lake seemed to be of vast extent.

Its shores were low and thickly wooded.

In fact, the jungle on each side of it seemed impenetrable.

The boys paddled toward the woods with their hands.

Then they perceived that the trees, the very jungle itself, seemed to grow out of water.

"There seems to be no bank, no shore here," said Rob.

"The shore is probably somewhere beyond the jungle," answered Jack. "But without a canoe and without paddles, we have no means of reaching it. It appears as if we are doomed to remain adrift in the lake."

"Hark! What was that?" cried Rob, suddenly.

"I certainly thought I heard a voice," said Jack.

The boys listened, and suddenly, apparently coming from the jungle, they heard a bell-like voice.

"Away! away!"

"What can that mean?" cried Jack, in amazement.

"Away! away!" came the voice again.

"It seems to come from one side of the lake," said Rob.

Both boys, it now chanced, peered down into the depths, which were so clear that they could see to the bottom.

And there they beheld the bright image of a female, evidently a queen.

This image from head to foot appeared to be of gold, and the upturned eyes were like jewels.

Far out from the head streamed the hair of this strange apparition, which seemed made of threads of gold.

The image was about five feet high, and the mantle which drooped from the shoulders and fell about the form below the knees was also made of gold.

For only a few seconds did the singular image remain visible.

A great, black, cloud-like shadow glided along under water, settled down over it, and hid it from sight.

CHAPTER X.

A HAUNTED LAKE.

THE boys looked at each other in the utmost surprise.

"Well, Jack, what do you think of that?" said Rob. "The Mashona, Mandara, was right. The gold queen is under this haunted lake in which we are adrift."

"Yes. I did not believe the Mashona, but I cannot now help believing what I have seen. Meanwhile, we cannot remain as we are. We must find some better resting-place than these two floating logs."

"What can we do?"

Jack looked about him for some moments ere he answered:

"There are numerous vines and supple twigs in this jungle. We must try to make some sort of craft."

"We have no tools, except my sword and our jack-knives."

"Well, with the sword we can cut some of those vines and twigs, and take some of the bark from the trees."

"What can we do with them?"

"We can weave together some sort of a craft."

"Not one which will be water-tight."

"No, not exactly, but near enough to it to be bearable—better than these logs."

Working the logs into the jungle, the boys cut a number of the vines and twigs which hung trailing in the water.

They were both skillful sailors, used to weaving spunyarn into different shapes and to making mats.

In a few hours they had contrived, as they sat astraddle of the logs, to twist the long supple vines and twigs into the shape of a basket.

To the bottom and sides they fastened the strong, flexible green bark of a species of rubber plant, with which the jungle abounded.

Then they secured the logs across the basket, and, in this way were provided with a seat, while at the same time the logs helped to keep the basket boat afloat.

It is impossible, without proper tools, to make a vessel of this kind perfectly water-tight.

The water, however, only rose a little above the boys' ankles.

It could enter the bottom, but not the sides—the latter being close enough and not having pressure enough against the water to leak.

With much trouble the lads now contrived to cut a couple of branches large enough to be shaped into paddles.

Provided with the latter, they could explore the lake in their curious little basket boat.

As a portion of this however must remain submerged, they could not make very swift progress.

Night began to close about them by the time they had finished their work, for besides making the boat they had also twisted some strong, supple vines into the shape of a hammock, to serve them for a sleeping place during the night.

This they secured to a branch so low that the hammock hung within a foot of the water.

It was necessary that one of them should keep watch to guard against serpents, crocodiles and other perilous creatures peculiar to this region.

Rob had the first watch.

He kept the sword which was buckled to his belt ready for instant use if required. He also looked to his pistol.

It was a lengthy, single-barreled one and could carry a long distance.

Both boys had dried their pistols carefully, and seen that the locks were in good order, after they got into the hammock.

They had a plentiful supply of ammunition in a large, water-proof flask, carried by each.

This would afford them a chance to shoot some of the numerous spotted hens, geese, wild ducks and other fowl with which the borders of the lake abounded.

Several times, as Rob continued his watch, he fancied he could hear in the distance a wailing sort of noise like that of a child in distress.

It seemed to draw nearer, but presently it ceased.

Some minutes later the boy heard a crashing noise among the thickly-entwined branches and vines above his head.

He looked up, but could see nothing in the dense shadows.

All at once he heard an unearthly, warning voice:

"Look out—look out!"

The weird cry rang plainly through the jungle.

Rob started and turned pale.

He was not superstitious, but the hearing of that voice in such a place naturally alarmed him.

"Well may this lake be termed a haunted one," he reflected. "Who on earth could have spoken?"

Again came the weird voice, louder than before:

"Look out—look out!"

At the same moment, as he chanced to look upward, he beheld two great, round orbs, which glittered like red-hot coals.

Instinctively he pointed his pistol toward those fierce eyes.

Whether belonging to man or beast, he was convinced they were those of an enemy.

He had scarcely pointed the pistol when, with a yell, a lean panther came whizzing down toward the sleeping form of Jack.

Rob fired at once, and with a snarl of rage and pain the panther, catching the edge of the hammock with its forepaws, hung by them, struggling to get into the swaying couch.

Evidently it had been wounded, but not mortally, by Rob's bullet, and now it flung itself into the hammock.

By this time Jack was awakened.

He opened his eyes to find himself under the savage beast, which was about to fasten its fangs in his throat.

"Lie still—don't move, Jack. I'll fix him!" cried Rob.

So saying, he drove his sword through the body of the ferocious brute, which, at once releasing its hold of its intended victim, dropped over the edge of the hammock, into the water.

"Are you hurt?" anxiously inquired Rob, as the panther after floundering about a few seconds sank beneath the water.

"Not much—only scratched a little," answered Jack, "but I was never more frightened in my life! I know now how to pity a coward, if that is the way one feels."

"No wonder you were scared," said Rob, "to be awakened suddenly in that manner."

"I was dreaming of ghosts," said Jack, laughing, "but I had no idea even in my sleep, that I was near becoming a ghost myself. Had I become one I should have haunted you, Rob, for not keeping a better lookout. You would have seen my ghost come up from the lake."

"Come up, ghost, from the lake!" cried the same weird voice, which Rob had previously heard.

"Hulloa!" said Jack. "What in the name of wonder was that?"

"God only knows," solemnly answered Rob. "Jack, there is some person—and, by the way he speaks, he must be a civilized white man—beside ourselves, somewhere in this jungle."

And he related to his friend the warning cry he had heard, just before the panther sprang from the tree.

Jack listened in wonder.

He reflected a moment and then said:

"It must be some poor demented fellow—perhaps a castaway."

"But where can he be? The voice seemed to come from the air itself."

"No, it only sounded so. In the morning we will take a look about us. It was the same voice which said 'away! away!' awhile ago. As to the lake's being haunted, that is, of course, sheer nonsense. Should I see a ghost come up from the lake, I—"

"Ghost, come up from the lake!" interrupted the strange, weird voice again.

Scarcely were the words uttered when a thin, white, transparent form rose from the waters of the lake, not twenty fathoms from the boys, close to a rock that projected from the jungle into the water.

The form had the appearance of a huge white shroud, and it was so transparent that the boys could see the moon, which had just risen, and the stars through it.

Gradually, on the upper part, there appeared something like a face—a face so hideous, so strangely disproportioned in its small size to the enormous form, that a cry of horror and dismay broke from the boys.

Could they doubt the evidence of their senses?

Was not this a specter?

There was the gigantic white shroud, and there was the face above it!

And such a face!

The nose was a thin line, the eyes large and round, yet devoid of all lifelike expression, and the skin, covered with a whitish sort of down, like that of a person only half shaved!

"God help us!" gasped Rob, "'tis a ghost!"

"Ay," said Jack, who trembled in spite of all his efforts to control himself. "No longer can we doubt that this is a haunted lake."

To their dismay the gigantic form now seemed to slowly approach them.

"Never before was I so frightened!" cried Jack. "That is enough to take the pluck out of any one!"

As he spoke he pointed his pistol straight at the awful form and fired.

But the bullet made no impression on it.

It still continued to advance.

"Away we go!" cried Rob. "I can't stand this!"

He was about to get into the basket boat, which floated alongside the hammock, when suddenly the phantom sheered off and appeared to disappear behind the projecting rock.

"Away, away!" sounded the weird voice which had previously been heard.

The boys looked at each other in amazement.

"Come," said Jack. "We have heard and seen strange things to-night, but I am now of the opinion that some trick has been played us to scare us away from this lake, which contains that wonderful gold image of the Queen of Sheba."

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURED.

Rob shook his head at this remark from his friend.

"No one could play a trick like that. How could a specter be made to appear on the lake?"

"The Arabs like the Hindoos are wonderful people at these things," answered Jack. "There must be some Arab or Arabs near us. The voice, perhaps, came from one who could speak good English."

"No, no," said Rob.

"So you really think the lake is haunted?" said Jack.

"How can I help it?" responded Bob, "after what we've seen. Were there a party of necromancers in our vicinity, would they not have possessed themselves of that precious gold image?"

"One would think so," said Jack, musingly. "Well, one thing is certain. I am not superstitious, and, therefore, I'm not going to bother myself as to the cause of anything wonderful we see here. I came here to look for my father, and I mean to continue the search until sure that he is not here. Meanwhile, if we fall in with the Masai warriors, I hope to re-possess myself of the Mary Bell."

"Where can those fellows be? We have seen no sign of them yet."

"No, and I doubt if we see them at all. In my opinion we cannot rely on the promises of a savage."

The boys talked awhile longer, when, nothing strange being again heard or seen, they prepared for their interrupted repose.

Jack now stood watch, Rob, tired out, slept soundly and his friend refrained from waking him.

When he opened his eyes the sun was shining.

"Awake at last?" said Jack, smiling.

"Ay, but I have had more than my share of sleep. It was wrong of you to let me sleep so long at the expense of your own rest."

"Don't mention it. I could not bear to wake you, when I saw you sleeping so soundly, and now we will have breakfast."

The boys partook of the biscuits in the waterproof bag.

Then they got into the basket boat, and thus, up to their ankles in the water, they prepared to paddle about to explore the lake.

All about the jungle trees waved the blossoms of clambering vines.

In countless numbers and of many hues they filled the air with fragrance, while brightly-colored birds were seen flitting about the branches, warbling and whistling their sweet melodies.

Now and then the long, ugly head of a crocodile was seen projected from the tangled thicket, and the form of the hippopotamus appeared at times, wallowing close to the borders of the jungle.

The boys first peered down into the waters of the lake, to see if the gold image was again in sight at the bottom.

They thought they could see the gleam of the golden hair, but the rest of the image was hidden by a thick mass of pink-colored seaweeds, which the action of the tide had caused to stream over and around it like a screen.

"I must go down and take a good look at that image," said Jack.

"There are too many weeds. You might get caught among them," said Rob.

"No fear of that. Those weeds are corallines and can easily be broken."

Off went the speaker's hat, jacket and shoes.

He dove down into the depths, keeping his eyes open under the water.

He soon reached the golden hair and handled it.

He could not doubt that it was made of threads of gold.

Then, seizing the image under the arm, he tried to lift it.

It was slender and but five feet high, but he was unable to budge it.

He now rose to the surface for air.

"Well?" said Rob.

"It is of solid gold, I really believe," said Jack, with sparkling eyes,

"but it is somehow fast to the bottom, for I could not move it."

Down he went again for a second trial.

But suddenly he heard a splash above him, and saw Rob beckoning to him to come up.

At the same moment Jack beheld the most singular object he had ever seen, approaching him, there under water.

It was enormous and semi-transparent, spreading far out like a large open skin of fine texture.

At first Jack thought it must be the floating skin of some animal, but he quickly perceived that it was endowed with life. A scarcely perceptible horn and long, hanging nose with minute eyes on each side could be distinguished.

As it glided on, a cloud-like mass of purplish liquor came from it and colored the water all about the boy and the image, so that he could not see the latter.

Then, to his horror, he perceived the singular object was settling down towards him, its minute eyes glittering with an evil expression.

He hastily rose to the surface and crawled into the boat.

"You saw that creature?" he said.

"Yes, I did. It is another of the wonders of the Haunted Lake. I am glad it did not hurt you, as I feared it might."

Jack looked into the depths, to perceive that the strange apparition, whatever it was, had settled down over the gold queen, and colored the water with its purplish liquor all about the image.

The boys now paddled on, resolved to yet make an attempt to possess themselves of the image.

They presently came to the mouth of a river, which opened upon the lake some distance from the place where they had entered it.

Suddenly, as they looked up the river, they beheld a vessel approaching, and only one glance was required to show them that this

craft was the Arab pirate dhow. Such a yell as rose from a man who was on the lookout forward the boys never heard before.

They took to their paddles, and finding a slight opening in the jungle, they were soon forcing their way through it.

On they went, to finally discover that they were near a low shore, which was tolerably clear of trees. They noticed a long rock near it, containing an opening, and into this they glided.

The cave was low and extended some distance.

It was very dark, but not far had the boys proceeded when their basket boat struck something.

Peering at it through the gloom they perceived that it was a long dugout or canoe.

"Here is a treasure cried Jack!" "Good-bye to our basket boat, which is always partly submerged. The canoe will prove to be a much better conveyance. It will enable us to sail on instead of in the lake."

"Meanwhile, I hope the pirates will not think to look for us in this cave," said Rob.

"We can continue to explore the cave in this splendid dugout," said Jack. "We may find some secret place of concealment which will serve us for a good rendezvous while we remain in this quarter."

The boys were about to enter the dugout when their arms were rudely seized in a grasp which was like iron, while several shining objects gleamed before their eyes and pricked their bosoms.

"Leave canoe alone," came a hoarse, guttural voice. "Touch not, or we quick kill."

Half a dozen of the bright blades flashed around them, and they now perceived that these were attached to long poles, and formed the spears of a group of Masai warriors, the outlines of whose hideous faces, and the gleam of whose fierce eyes they could make out through the gloom.

They were quickly pulled away from the dugout to a broad, rocky platform, and thrown down upon their backs.

The faces above them were many.

The long two-feet-and-a-half blades of the spears played about them like lightning, and they expected every instant to feel them in their bodies.

An iron hand grasped the throat of each of the young sailors, so that they were unable to speak.

"What we do with them?" came a hoarse, croaking voice. "Speak, chief of the Masai men, and tell us what we do."

Out of the darkness came a terrible voice, like the rumbling of thunder.

"Are they spies?"

"We think they are spies."

"They must be spies," said one of the warriors. "No one else would come to the lake. They are of the Arab pirates."

"Then they shall die the death of spies!" cried the terrible voice.

"Let the skin be ripped from their bodies from head to heel! Thus will the Masai warriors do their duty, for thus do they ever serve such enemies."

One of the blades was laid edgeways on Jack's neck. He who held it was about to draw the sharp edge along to cut into the skin, when a voice rang out from some one entering the cave in a canoe, the noise of which could be heard.

"Calaymo Kayyuka!" rose the voice shrilly and sharply.

It was evidently an intimation to the Masai men to pause in their horrid purpose of skinning the boys alive, in accordance with the barbarous custom of these people.

"It is Taveta who speaks!" cried the chief. "Let your spears be held up until we learn why we should stop."

As he spoke Taveta, with the crocodile skin suspended to his shoulder, entered the cavern.

The sun now was so high that rays of light entered through chinks in the rocky roof, revealing the red clay and grease-besmeared forms and the ugly faces of the group of Masai warriors, who numbered here about a dozen.

The chief, a man of gigantic build, and the blade of whose terrible spear was half a foot longer than any of those of his companions, was distinguished by an enormous ostrich feather in his head-dress, and an extra number of bright red and blue beads were strung about his neck.

The missionaries who had penetrated to his native borders, although they had taught him to speak plain English, had evidently not yet succeeded in taming his ferocious nature.

The expression of his hideous face was brutal in the extreme, and the piercing flash of his big, round eyes was like that of a wild beast.

"What has Taveta to say?" he inquired. "Speak quickly, for we are eager for the white boys' skins. They are spies, and should be ripped from head to heel."

"Oh, chief, you mistake!" answered Taveta. "From a distance did I see the white boys making for the cavern, for their lives, from the pirates. The pirates have come to the lake. They are the boys' enemies—not their friends."

Then, in a few words, he detailed his encounter with them by the river bank, as already described.

"Your hands from their throats that they may speak!" cried the chief, to the men who still held the young sailors down on their backs.

He was obeyed, and as soon as the half-choked boys could regain their breath, Jack made his voice heard.

"Chief," he said, "you have been about to kill me and my companion, but we will let that pass if you and your warriors help me to re-possess myself of my schooner."

The chief uttered a short, croaking laugh of derision.

"You will let it pass!" he said. "Yahoo! of course that must be! What can the small tree do to the hurricane, even after it has torn the tree's branches? Nothing. So it is with you—the small boys!"

"You will help me recover my schooner? You will help me try to find my lost father?"

A dark scowl passed over the chief's ugly features.

"So you think the captain of the Monmouth lives?" he said.

"I know not, but I hope so," answered Jack. "I have thought he might be somewhere near this Haunted Lake!"

"Tis the lake of ghosts," answered the chief. "Before now they may have added the ghosts of the captain and his white sailors to their number. Why should Pangani, the chief, help you? Listen. The Arab pirates captured your father's ship—the Monmouth. A storm came, and the ship went to pieces on the Zanzibar coast. From afar we saw her rent to fragments. When the storm was over, we went to what was left of the wreck. There was plenty of iron, plenty of rings, copper, brass and coils of rope left.

"We got many of these things. But the Arab pirates came and fired upon our men with their guns, and they fired on the wreck until not a stick was left. They killed some of our men, and we now want our revenge. But, though that be so, we cannot help you. Were your schooner restored to you, and your lost father found, the white men would afterwards come with ships and big guns to slay the Masai warriors. But oh! listen. We fear them not, but we would rather the fate of the ship were never known. Boys! You must die! Pangani has told you too much!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH BARGAIN.

AGAIN the Masai warriors bent over the boys with their terrible weapons.

"Avast there!" cried Jack. "So far from punishing you for taking the things from the wreck, I can promise you that my father would reward you for helping me and from rescuing him from any situation from which he would be glad to escape."

At this Pangani made a sign to his men to suspend their spears.

"And what would the white men give Pangani for saving them?" he inquired.

"For saving them?" cried Jack. "Oh, chief! Speak—tell me, do you know where they are?"

At this the hideous face of Pangani wore such a leer as a horse-jockey might have put on, if a purchaser before naming the price he would pay had asked him to select for him a first-rate horse.

"The boys are from Yankee land, where, we have heard, they ask many questions before they answer one put to them. Pangani is a Masai warrior. The Yankee boy shall know nothing till he names the price he would pay."

"How much would you charge?" inquired Jack. "Name your price, that we may know what to give you."

Pangani reflected a few moments, and then said:

"Four loads of iron, brass and copper wire, fifty strings of beads—red and blue—eight rolls of bright red cloth and two casks of the hard, round, flour cakes—sea biscuits—that the men of the sea crack with their teeth, together with two big barrels of salt."

"Those things you shall have," answered Jack, while the Masai warriors, who, at the word "salt," had begun to lick their chops and smack their lips, rolled their eyes with greedy pleasure at the, to them, enormous price their chief had named.

"Understand," said Jack, with the true American "stickling" for a thorough bargain, "that you are to have these things in case you not only get me back my schooner but also find my father."

"Tis to be done," answered the chief. "And we must have the Arab dow, too."

"Yes, and you will restore my father to me?" cried Jack, almost beside himself with joy.

"We shall see," was the evasive answer.

The boy's countenance fell.

"Listen," said Pangani, "we will first take the things you name, and then we will see about your father."

"I don't believe you know where he is after all," said Jack, much disappointed.

To this the chief made no reply.

"Will the boy do as I say?" he presently asked.

"Promise that you will," whispered Rob. "By this means you will at any rate get back your schooner."

"Be it so!" cried Jack.

Pangani gave a grunt of approval.

Then, all at once, it flashed on Jack's mind that, were the Masais to recover the schooner for him, there would be nothing to hinder them not only from taking possession of the things he had named but of everything else aboard the craft itself.

He wondered he had not thought of this before, and he now said:

"I hope the Masai warriors will be true to the white boys. If not, woe be to them!"

"What means the boy?" inquired the chief, in a voice of thunder.

"I mean," firmly answered Jack, "that if you try to take more than is agreed on, the ghosts of the lake will avenge us. Remember this is a haunted lake, and we have seen the chief of the ghosts."

Like most of the African tribes, the Masai people were very superstitious.

"What did the white boy see?" the chief inquired.

In a few words Jack described the vision of the previous night, and added a little fiction, justifiable under the circumstances.

"The ghost informed us, in a strange, terribly hollow voice, that it would avenge us if any one tried to harm us," he said.

Pangani and his men exchanged glances.

Their long-bladed spears shook like aspens in their grasp.

Fearful that they might conclude to leave the lake without trying to assist him, Jack continued:

"But the ghost said that those who helped us should ever after be rewarded with prosperity and with success in arms."

"It is well," said Pangani. "We know there are ghosts of the lake, for we have heard the voice of one. The boys need have no fear. The Masai warrior keeps his word."

"That settles the bargain, then," said Jack.

As he spoke, a strange noise was heard.

It was a sort of hollow rumbling, as if a volley of musketry were fired under the very waters of the lake.

A number of strange, weird shouts were heard to follow from the same direction.

Then all was as still as before.

The boys looked at each other in amazement at these sounds, seeming to come up from the Haunted Lake.

But to their surprise the Masai warriors, standing like so many statues, appeared to remain unmoved.

"Chief, what was that noise?" inquired Jack.

"The lake is a lake of ghosts," answered Pangani, "but the Masai men fear them not, as they mean to do right by the boys."

Then he added, as he seized his lengthy buffalo shield and his enormous spear:

"Come, we will now make ready to keep our word."

In a few moments from dark alcoves in the rock the savages drew forth four long dugouts.

They embarked in them with the boys and paddled out to the jungle.

Keeping on through a narrow water-way among the trees, they presently reached a bank of low land, on which there was a thick grove, so intertwined with vines that it would have hidden the occupants from the gaze of any one not close to the place.

These occupants consisted of about sixty Masai warriors, all armed like the others the boys had seen.

The chief sent a man up into a tall palm tree to take a look at the lake.

Jack followed him.

His sailor training had made him a good climber, but he had to acknowledge to himself that the native was a better one.

Up he went like a monkey, with a succession of long, nimble leaps.

Jack finally joined him, and now through interstices in the vines, twined about the tree, he beheld the Arab dow and the Mary Bell, both anchored on the lake.

Some of the Arabs in the boat were peering down into the clear depths.

Evidently they were looking for the gold image of the queen.

They had probably concluded this valuable treasure could be found by them, and had resolved to possess themselves of it.

This, together with their intention of waylaying and capturing the Mary Bell, was the motive which had drawn them so far inland from their cruising grounds off the sea coast.

They did not yet see the image. Jack could perceive that they were not in the right locality to do so.

With the native he descended the tree.

The Masai warriors had about eight dugouts in all, which they had probably stolen or bought from natives on the river shores.

These were enough to contain the whole party, who now embarked.

As stealthily as snakes did the Masai warriors approach the part of the lake where lay the two schooners.

Their paddles made scarcely a sound in the water.

There was a light breeze, and the rippling noise would be thought by any one hearing it on the lake to be that of the water laving the trunks of the trees.

As Rob Ransom and Jack looked to their pistols to make sure they were in good order, they could not help admiring the skill with which the warriors urged their vessels through the tangle of the water jungle without making a noise.

At last they were near the borders of the lake, and the dugouts containing the fierce party suddenly came rushing out from their concealment before the gaze of the astonished and dismayed Arabs.

It was a complete surprise.

Before the men sitting in the boat could even seize their oars, the warriors were upon them.

The terrible spears shot out with quick, powerful thrusts, and the whole crew of six sat suddenly transfixed by the long blades, which projected beyond their backs.

As they were withdrawn, one of the pirates, who had been crouched in the boat taking a drink from the water keg, sprang into the lake.

The chief smiled grimly.

From his belt he drew his brain-crusher.

It left his hand with a sort of swing, so adroitly hurled that the round brass ball at the end crashed into the Arab's skull, and then, as his head dropped back, the awful weapon was thrown over, point foremost, into the front of his throat.

There it remained sticking until the chief, quickly seizing the instrument, withdrew it and replaced it in his belt.

Loud were the war cries which now rose from the Masai men.

Paddling swiftly and steadily, and keeping time by stamping with their feet, they sent forth a harsh, screeching sort of ovation.

Afterward the boys heard this translated as follows:

"Ugh! ugh! ugh! Come we—come we! Masai warriors come for prey! Open hearts and open skulls to the spears and brain-crushers! Pangani comes—the big black thunderbolt, to smite his foes! Yahoo! yahoo! sing their dirge! Long blades mow them down! Kill them, crush them, skin their thin, long heads and forms!"

There was a puff of smoke and a flash from the dow, followed by the roar of a small gun.

A Masai warrior fell, head downward, with a big hole in his skull, made by a round shot.

Another shot was fired, but Jack had advised the chief to keep his canoes further apart, and this second missile passed between them, buzzing viciously as it ripped up the waters of the lake.

Pangani, following Jack's directions, reached the dow without the loss of another man.

The pirates, about fifty in number, stood ready with pikes, pistols and cutlasses to prevent them from boarding.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

"A QUICK RUSH!" cried Jack, turning to the chief, "and we will be on deck!"

The Masai men, seizing the fore and main chains, on both sides, clambered aboard the schooner.

The thrusts of the Arabs' pikes and the blows of their swords—even the bullets from their pistols had no effect on the shields of their opponents, who contrived to cover themselves with these defenses, while, with wonderful agility, they used only one hand and their long, naked feet in climbing.

An Arab had aimed a pistol at Jack's head, and the missile would have stretched him dead in the dugout, but for Taveta.

This quick-eyed warrior held his immense, oblong buffalo shield so that the bullet glanced off from the edge, without touching the youth it was fired at.

A minute later all the dusky warriors were on the pirate's deck.

Madeb, the Arab leader, waved his sword and exhorted his fierce band to fight as they had never fought before.

But scarcely had the words passed his lips when Pangani, with Jack and Rob on each side of him, rushed with his men to the attack. A desperate combat ensued.

The clash of blades and the report of small arms were almost incessant.

But the shots of the Arabs glanced harmlessly off of the shields of the Masai warriors.

In a solid sort of phalanx they presented their enormous spears at their opponents with one hand, while holding their shields with the other.

The clash of the cutlasses against these spear-blades was followed by such powerful swings and sweeps of the Masai weapons that, in many cases, the swords were dashed from or broken in the grasp of their foe.

Then, with tiger-like leaps, would the Masai men fairly seem to fly at their opponents, driving their awful spear-blades through their bodies, or wielding the brain-crushers with equally deadly effect.

The Arabs fought like veritable demons, but they fought in vain against such foes as those now confronting them.

The ringing voice of Howland was blended with that of the chief cheering on the warriors.

He wielded the cutlass he had provided himself with from a fallen enemy with an effect that won the applause of Pangani.

Furious at the prospect of defeat, Madeb witnessed the fearful slaughter of his Arabs, while not one of the Masai men was yet killed.

The spear blade of Pangani suddenly dashed his sword from his hand.

He uttered a fierce yell, plucked his dagger, and, avoiding the dreadful thrust of the broad blade by stooping low, he darted under the buffalo shield of the chief, and, seizing the latter by the throat, was about to plant the knife in his heart, when Jack dealt him a blow from his cutlass across his neck.

Madeb staggered, but even in falling, would have contrived to rip open the body of the chief with the dagger, had not Pangani brought his brain-crusher with a dull, horrible crash down upon his skull.

The loss of their leader discouraged the pirates.

Some of them, however, tried to bring one of the guns to bear upon their foes.

They would have succeeded but for Jack, who at once divined their intention.

"Follow me, Rob, and some of you Masai men!" he cried.

With a panther-like bound, he reached the gunners, and instantly cut down the one who was about to pull the lock-string.

Another tried to do this, but Rob Ransom passed his sword through his body.

In another moment half a dozen cutlasses were about to descend on the boys, when, like great, broad lightning flashes, came the terrible spear-blades, cutting and slashing the Arabs to death.

The remainder of the crew, retreating aft, still desperately resisted.

But, with wild, demon-like cries, the Masai warriors made their horrible blades and brain-crushers spin like mill wheels about their foes, and soon not a single Arab was left alive on the deck.

Meanwhile, the few Arabs aboard the Mary Bell had been getting up the anchor, hoping to escape in this craft from their formidable enemies.

But Jack Howland now quickly gave his orders, and with Rob

showed the Masai men how to heave up the anchor of the dow and brace the yards, the sails of which had not been furled.

The youth then took the wheel, and ere the Mary Bell could be headed out of the lake, he brought the Red Moon alongside of her.

There were but ten Arabs aboard the prize.

The Masai warriors boarded her, and despite Jack's efforts to have the lives of this handful of sailors spared, they cut down every pirate in a few moments with their spear-blades.

"Now, God grant that our few men who were aboard here when the vessel was captured by the Arabs have been spared," said Jack.

Cries from the hold, now heard, assured him that the remnant of his crew were there.

He went down into the hold, and was glad to find in it twenty-six of his men with the first lieutenant, and also the Mashona, Mandara. They had been tied, hand and foot, and the lieutenant informed Jack that it had been the intention of their cruel captors to subject them to a lingering death from starvation.

The youth speedily freed them from their bonds, and all were presently on deck.

The sight of the terrible Masai warriors was not a pleasant one to these men, but Jack quickly explained that he had made an agreement with them to assist him in the rescue of his father.

"Pangani will keep his word," said the chief. "The boy has a white skin, but he has a black (brave) heart. Pangani knows that the boy saved his life in the fight, when the Arab captain would have stabbed him with his dagger. It is well. The Masai men will do what is right."

Jack, as soon as the decks had been cleared of the dead, proceeded to distribute the presents he had promised, for he had brought out with him plenty of copper wire, beads and rolls of cloth, in case he should find it necessary to traffic with the natives.

"Now listen to Pangani—the chief of the great Masai warriors," said the huge savage. "He knows where the boy's father can be found!"

"Lose no time, then, chief," cried Howland, joyfully, "in guiding me to him!"

Pangani laughed hoarsely as he pointed down at the lake.

"The boy's father is there!" he said.

Angry and horrified, Jack glared at the speaker.

The first lieutenant and his men, who had just finished partaking of a hasty repast, were now collected near their young captain.

Believing that the latter had been deceived, they also turned dark glances on the chief.

"You mean that he is dead—that my father is dead?" said Jack.

"No—no—he lives, but he is down under the lake. Who put him there? Some of the Matabele men—the foes of the Masai! They did not want him to have the gold image. They are friendly to the Arabs."

"That you may believe!" cried Mandara to Jack.

"And how are we to rescue him?" inquired Jack. "Quick—if you know the way to the place where he is lead us there."

"Come, then, follow me," said Pangani. "To me did a Matabele captive tell where Captain Howland and his men were shut up. They were to be left there to die. But they had plenty of provisions with them, and so they are yet alive."

Taking with him Rob Ransom and a couple of his men, Jack accompanied Pangani in his dugout to the same cave in which the boys had had so narrow an escape from being skinned alive by the warriors. Far into the cave did Pangani go.

Then the huge savages who were with him proceeded to remove a great rock that had been jammed into a large opening.

"Look!" said the chief.

Gazing through the opening down a pit, the boys beheld, about twenty feet beneath them, the floor of a large cavern.

So steep were the sides of the rocky pit that no human being could climb them.

The light of several lamps illumined the cavern, and showed to the astonished boys the forms of some white sailors who occupied it.

These persons now looked up, and a simultaneous shout of joy escaped them at sight of the two boys above, who were dimly revealed to them.

Presently a man in a faded uniform advanced and spoke.

"Whoever you are," he cried, "I hope you will rescue us from this place, where we have been confined for more than eighteen months!"

"Father, father!" cried Jack, "do you not know me?"

"What! my son, Jack?" cried Captain Howland, in accents of deep joy. "Can it be you? Thank God! then, indeed, our deliverance is at hand!"

"Ay, father, a rope is all that is necessary," said Jack, surprised that his father had not tried before now to climb up by means of a line, which he might have contrived in some way to make fast above.

"No! no!" cried the captain. "You cannot descend that way, for at any moment a deadly sort of gas—a noxious kind of vapor may come out of a crevice in the rock. This takes place every minute, and that is what has prevented our escaping from here. Our boats were attacked by many of the Matabele natives, and all but one were sunk soon after we reached the lake. Fortunately we had stowed all our provisions and many useful articles in the cave where you are, and which we had intended to use as a rendezvous."

"We fought the Matabeles and finally drove them off. Then we continued our search for that great curiosity and treasure—the golden image of the queen, which we had come to the lake to seek."

"We had previously noticed the pit leading down to this subterranean cave, which is in a rock bed under the bottom of the lake."

"We had observed that a noxious, deadly vapor ascended from a cavity at the base of one side of the pit, and found its way out through a crevice in the rock above, so that it did not enter the upper cavern—the one in which you are.

"One night we were surprised by hundreds of Matabeles.

"We found that we could not long keep them back from our rendezvous. I therefore gave orders to have all our provisions and other articles thrown down into this subterranean lower cave."

"Half my men were killed in the attempt to keep the savages at bay.

"The rest of us were compelled to drop down into this cave upon some rolls of hammocks, which we had thrown at the base of the pit.

"The rapidity of our descent hindered our being hurt by the deadly gas from the cavity.

"Those demons of Matabeles then rolled a large rock over the opening above to shut us in.

"Fortunately we had provisions to last the twenty of us who remained alive a long time.

"We also had a few muskets, pistols and ammunition.

"These we occasionally discharged in the slender hope that some white men might be near the lake, hear the noise and discover us."

Then Jack told his father about the loss of the Monmouth, and described some of his other experiences.

Meanwhile, he could see a thick vapor ascending from the cavity below and escaping through an opening in the rocky roof above the pit.

"Tell me, father," he anxiously cried, "how we are to rescue you from the place where you are?"

"The only way," said the captain, "is by blasting enough of the rocky roof to enable us to mount clear of the deadly vapor—far enough from it for it not to hurt us."

Jack at once sent orders by Rob to the schooner for a large supply of powder.

This was finally brought, and the opening was made by blasting.

Then, by means of ropes lowered to them, the captain and his men left the place of their long captivity, and Jack's father was at last restored to him.

After all were aboard the Mary Bell and the Masai warriors had taken their departure for the dōw, preparations were made to rescue the image of the gold queen at the bottom of the lake.

Meanwhile, Jack speaking to his father about the report of the lake's being haunted, described the ghostly vision he and Rob had seen and the weird voice they had heard.

The captain laughed.

"The voice you heard," he answered, "came from a parrot which one of my sailors had brought with him, and which had escaped into the jungle. As to the vision, I saw that, too, and was at first startled by it. An investigation showed me that it was merely caused by vapor coming from the jungle and settling on the lake. In this jungle there are large, globular, white blossoms, marked with two dots and a streak between, which give them something the appearance of human faces. They are about the size of a small cocoanut, and as thin as a paper balloon. Now and then one, detached from its stalk, will float out above the lake, and when seen above a mass of vapor, the effect is like that of a transparent shroud, with a face on top of it."

Jack soon guided his father, in a boat provided with ropes and chains, above the spot where he and Rob had seen the golden image.

The strange creature which had settled on it and shrouded it from view rose from it and glided off.

"That is a sea hare," said Captain Howland. "The animal has the power of shedding an inky sort of liquor, which spreads and colors the water depths like a cloud."

Jack dove and fastened a chain about the gold image.

Then he returned to the boat.

The men in it began to pull.

At last they disengaged the treasure from the sandy bottom in which it was stuck fast, and it was conveyed to the schooner.

Then the vessel sailed away, leaving the Arab dōw in the possession of the Masai warriors.

Piloted by the Mashona, Mandara, the Mary Bell, favored by the current, reached the sea in a few days.

Then Mandara took leave of Jack and Rob, and went to join his people.

A few months later the Mary Bell arrived at New York.

The gold image of the Queen of Sheba was purchased of Captain Howland at an enormous price, by the proprietor of a museum.

The captain retired from a sea life, but Jack and Rob continued to serve for some time in the navy.

Both are now settled down and married. Often to his friends does Jack joyfully relate how he and his chum at last found his father in the HAUNTED LAKE, after they had discovered a clew to the MYSTERY OF THE LOST WAR-CRAFT.

[THE END.]

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